

APRIL 2006

IN THESE TIMES

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the Washington Consensus

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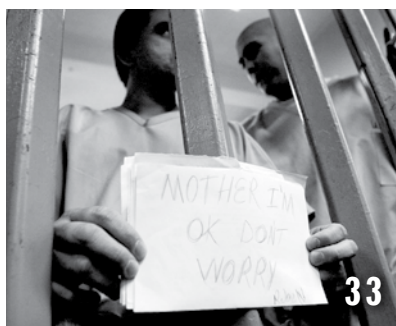


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© Oxford Cartographer, www.odt.org.

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They've Come for Us All

FIRST THEY CAME for the Communists," runs the opening of the famous poem about the Nazis' incremental persecution of minorities. So perhaps we should admire the efficiency of Reps. James Sensenbrenner (R-Wisc.) and Peter King (R-N.Y.) in sponsoring "immigration reform" legislation that revokes the rights of both undocumented immigrants and the rest of us, all at once.

In December, the House passed the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act by a vote of 239 to 182, thanks to the complicity of 36 Democrats. Reading as if it was penned in a vacuum—wholly removed from the 12 million undocumented immigrants toiling in the dark underbelly of our glistening, service-oriented New Economy—the 257-page bill is an affront to reality. Among other monstrosities, it would classify these workers as felons subject to imprisonment, permanently bar them from legal status, put numerous roadblocks in the way of legal immigrants and political refugees, and authorize construction of a giant fence along a third of the U.S.-Mexico border.

Given the perverse glee our culture takes in penalizing its marginalized, the act's solely punitive measures toward undocumented immigrants should come as no surprise. What might be more surprising—although it's become increasingly less so—is that the bill also tramples the rights of U.S. citizens. The act defines "smugglers" of immigrants so broadly that it would include a counselor or helping victims of domestic violence, a church volunteer providing them with food or clothing, or a worker driving a fellow employee to the bus stop. Such senseless acts of kindness could be rewarded with up to five years in prison.

Of course, enforcing this law and imprisoning the millions of doctors, teachers and workers who deal with immigrants on a daily basis is patently absurd, as well as rife with the potential to be selectively used. As Josh Bern-

stein, director of federal policy for the L.A.-based National Immigration Law Center, says, "Anti-immigration groups often talk about the rule of law, but here we are passing laws that nobody believes are going to be enforced."

The good news is that the House bill won't become law as is. The bad news is that the immigration reform bill of Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), being marked up in committee as *In These Times* went to press, is only marginally better. If given enough time to work, however, the committee appears likely to incorporate many of the provisions of the bipartisan bill introduced by Sens. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) and John McCain (R-Ariz.). While far from perfect, it would put undocumented immigrants on the path to citizenship.

Unfortunately, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) has threatened to undercut the committee and introduce his own bill, focused solely on border control measures, to the Senate floor on March 27. Frist is rushing this important legislation for the same reason the House bill got passed in the first place: political grandstanding.

Despite the split on immigration between the GOP's business faction and its culturally conservative base, many Republicans would love to show voters how "tough" they are on immigrants, regardless of how ill-thought-out the legislation may be. In a cynical attempt to fire up their base, they are willing to destroy the slowly emerging, bipartisan consensus on real immigration reform.

In a beautiful irony, however, the strategy may well backfire. On March 10, activists organized a march in Chicago to protest the House legislation. They expected 10,000 people, at most; instead, more than 100,000 showed up. The divisive legislation awoke what Bernstein calls a "sleeping giant": the growing political power of Latinos. "If I was a Republican," says Bernstein, "I would be scared. I would be really scared." ■

—Brian Cook

IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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mixed reaction

QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

It had always been a mystery, according to Rep. Katherine Harris (R-Fla.), why the D.C.-based defense contractor MZM, its employees and some of their spouses had donated \$32,000 to her re-election campaign in 2004.

THE QUO:

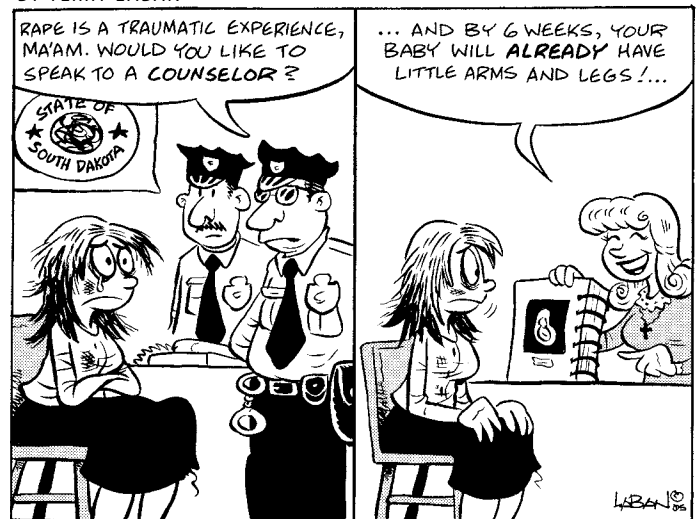
The clouds parted on Feb. 24, when MZM CEO Mitchell Wade pleaded guilty to bribing Rep. Duke Cunningham (R-Calif.), as well as to charges that he had illegally donated to the campaigns of Harris and Rep. Virgil Goode (R-Va.). Court documents described a dinner meeting in early 2005 between Wade and Harris, in which Wade asked Harris to secure MZM a defense contract. Former aides to Harris say that after the meeting she requested around \$10 million in funding for MZM's proposal from the Defense Appropriations subcommittee.

Alas, Harris submitted her request after a key deadline and MZM did not receive the money.

“ Well, I learned a lot, because that's what I went to do. I went down to find out from them and their views. And you'd be surprised, yes, because, you know, they're all individual countries. ”

RONALD REAGAN, ON TRAVELING TO LATIN AMERICA
DECEMBER 4, 1982

BY TERRY LABAN



the lexicon

incompetent [n.]

TRADITIONAL USAGE: One inadequate for or unsuited to a particular purpose or application.

CURRENT USAGE: [synonym] George W. Bush

When asked by the Pew Research Center to describe the president in one word, more respondents chose "incompetent," than any other single word. The term most frequently used in the survey last winter, "honest," tumbled to sixth place, beating out "arrogant" by a single reply.

All said, 48 percent of the descriptors provided by those questioned were negative; "idiot," "liar," and "ass" all broke this year's top 10.

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



letters



Nix the Neo-romanticism

Lakshmi Chaudhry's "Men Growing Up To Be Boys," (March 2006) about constructions of masculinity in the context of consumer capitalism, points out interesting connections between the generalized narcissism of postmodern society and recent pop culture iterations of male (white and heterosexual) identity for the 18-to-34 demographic. But that's about all it does.

In an essay that deals with notably complex issues such as gender roles, socialization and family formation, she is content to jump from one media-referenced cliché to the next in the service of a rather tendentious argument. She sets up straw men (no pun intended) in the form of fatuous television programs and advertising tropes, and then knocks them down with selective social statistics and quotations from works of pop sociology. The result is a witty caricature that doesn't address a set of social phenomena deserving of a more nuanced treatment.

Moreover, there are

disturbingly reactionary undertones to the arguments Chaudhry puts forth. Her apparent acceptance of a facile construction of traditional heterosexual rites of passage as normative implicitly excludes any deviations. I can't imagine why feminists—or any other progressives, for that matter—should embrace the essentializing conceptions about masculinity and "family" that are implied. A neo-romantic yearning for supposedly lost verities and values is not the answer to confronting the social externalities created by late capitalism. The real social reactionaries will beat you at that game every time.

Mark Marino
Sarasota, Fla.

Detention Blues

I doubt if anybody who read the article "Walking to Guantánamo" (February 2006) by Frida Berrigan was not saddened, ashamed and furious. Why are we doing this? Is our hold on Afghanistan so tenuous that a mere 500 or so men, if released, could upset the situation? Are the prisoners still "giving" us valuable intelligence after so many months and are we foolishly acting on it? Can we ever justify the millions of tax dollars spent on transporting, housing and feeding them?

Berrigan may have found walking to Guantánamo a difficult task, but walking away from the shame of Guantánamo will prove even more difficult.

G.M. Chandu
Flushing, N.Y.

Bad Intelligence

It's often said that, "a picture is worth a thousand words." But when the picture is false (or fallaciously captioned), what does that do to the credibility of the accompanying story? The picture that accompanied "When Red Goes Green" (February 2006) is captioned, "Gas emissions belch from giant smokestacks of a power station in Beijing..." Those aren't smokestacks; they're cooling towers. The billows above them aren't gas emissions; they're clouds of moisture from the cooling water. The towers are necessary components of any inland power station, regardless of the heat source. The condensed water tells us nothing whatever of the combustion cleanliness of the power generation at the plant.

Bill Bedford
Vista, Calif.

Peace, Anyone?

After reading "Were Sanctions Worth the Price?" (March 2006), I got the feeling the main message was missed. It seemed to boil down to what is the best way of subduing our enemies: shoot or starve them? An article written by a progressive/liberal and published by those who support these values should suggest a more positive approach, such as resolving the systematic issues that produce the state of conflict.

Carl Archambeau
Grand Ledge, Mich.

More Trash Talk

Aaron Sarver's interview with author Heather Rogers ("Talking Trash," Feb-

ruary 2006) has added to the considerable disservice many writers are doing to environmentalism and the movement towards more sustainable civil infrastructures. While Rogers' book *Gone Tomorrow: The Secret Life of Garbage* seems well-meant, her responses in Sarver's interview indicate a rather severe bent towards sensationalism when what would be far more useful is a reasoned argument.

Rogers is quoted as saying that landfill liners ("plastic liners") have been designed to last only 30 to 50 years. Either she is missing at least a zero on the end of both cited numbers, or she has confused the service life of the landfill with the service life of the plastic liner. They have drastically different lifespans. The liner, while "plastic," is designed to function for many generations—for hundreds of years. Manufactured, tested, and installed correctly, it will. The landfill, on the other hand, is designed to collect waste only for as long as its open volume allows the addition of new waste. When it's full, it's full. Modern designs predict about 30 years of space. The plastic liner continues to function. It continues to contain leachate and waste. How is it that the simple plastics we throw away in droves are written off as long-term threats to the environment while the highly engineered plastic liners designed to contain that waste are written off as having all the integrity of a spent snot rag?

These missteps in environmental journalism do not mean that we don't need to effect some large changes in how we manufacture and use

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Don't miss our exclusive Web-only stories:

Lakshmi Chaudhry's "Sex and the Septuagenarians," was selected by the *New York Times* for its Week in Review "Reading File."

Air America's Sam Seder talks with Ned Lamont about his race against Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman.

Christopher Hayes interviews ex-Marine Brian Stiedle on the Million Voices For Darfur campaign.

Aaron Sarver raps with hip-hopper Kevin Coval.

Jehangir Pocha reports on China's crackdowns on dissidents.

Salim Muwakkil talks with Kanye West's mother about her son's political calling.



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a radio forum sponsored by *In These Times*

Aaron Sarver sits down with Jeff Chang, author of *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, and talks about Chang's award-winning book and the history of hip-hop.

Also, hear thoughts on democracy matters by Dr. Cornel West, Princeton University professor, public intellectual and activist. We bring you an excerpt of a recent speech he gave as part of the University of Chicago's Organization of Black Students George E. Kent lecture series.

To hear the show, visit fireontheprairie.com.

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goods. Clearly, we must reduce our waste, and we must make the waste we have less detrimental to the environment. But there is no excuse for being so incorrect when writing about these issues.

Chris Kelsey
St. Paul, Minn.

HEATHER ROGERS RESPONDS:

Kelsey's response is emblematic of how the waste industry greenwashes their practices. As an employee of a firm, Geosynthetica.net, that markets engineering literature on landfill liner materials, Kelsey has a vested interest in promoting landfills. But he doesn't reveal this up front; instead he professes his concern for the environment and casts doubt on someone who calls into question the industry line.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, "Even the best liner and leachate collection system will ultimately fail due to natural deterioration." The exact time frame of that failure is unknown, even to the top engineers at the most prestigious research centers.

The estimated lifespan for landfill liners can only be a guess because there are so many variables involved. And, significantly, there has been little truly independent testing.

The uneven settling of the contents of a land disposal site means that pressure on a liner can develop in unexpected ways. And given the hazardous liquid stew from household wastes—including toxins that leak from batteries, plastics, electronic wastes, cleaning fluids, etc.—these liners must be able to withstand a serious chemical onslaught.

No doubt there are plenty of engineers and other workers that are dedicated to making sure landfills don't leak, and perhaps even see themselves as environmentalists.

But the reality is that the rubbish corporations that now dominate the waste industry earn more before tax income from landfilling than from all other rubbish handling operations combined. So they have incentives to send as much of our discards to the dump as possible, and to keep us believing everything's hunky-dory. And they have few incentives to meaningfully invest in waste reduction programs such as composting, reuse, and responsible recycling.

Today's rubbish handlers avoid addressing the real dangers of their operations, yet transparency is exactly what the public and the environment need.

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Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi waxes Reagan-esque.

Head of Stage

Berlusconi uses members of Congress as props in his bid for re-election

BY CHRISTOPHER HAYES

WHEN ITALIAN PRIME MINISTER Silvio Berlusconi came to Washington, D.C., on Feb. 28, he received a warm welcome. President Bush gushed, "He is such a positive, optimistic person." And Congress convened a special meeting of both houses to hear from the man Italians call (some with admiration, others with derision) "Il Cavaliere," or "The Knight." Berlusconi entered the House chamber to a standing ovation, beaming and pressing the flesh as he approached the dais. We love him, the applause seemed to say, we really love him.

Amidst all the mutual affection, Rep. Jim McDermott (D-Wash.) sensed something amiss. He had decided to attend the speech because he'd heard rumors Berlusconi might address Italy's plan to withdraw its troops from Iraq. But upon arriving, he was surprised to find that Berlusconi would deliver the bulk of his talk in Italian with no interpreter. Others

found it odd as well. "It was a little out of the ordinary," says Joe Shoemaker, communications director for Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.). "Usually they have a translator, or they speak English."

As Berlusconi spoke—soaring pronouncements about democracy, free markets, and the unity of purpose between Europe and America—members of Congress punctuated the remarks with applause forte. The audience followed Berlusconi's oration using a printed English translation of the speech. Yet, as if on cue, they knew exactly when to clap.

"You have to wonder if there might not have been a cheerleader in the audience," says McDermott, "How else would we have known when to stand up?" He thinks that the performance was really intended for the voters in Italy, where the speech was being broadcast on several of the stations in Il Cavaliere's Mediaset empire. Like sailors on the flight deck of the USS Lincoln during Bush's "Mission

Accomplished" photo op, the members of Congress were there as extras in a taxpayer-funded campaign commercial.

And they had company. "They had filled the audience with interns," says McDermott. But Shoemaker disagrees: "There were maybe 200 to 250 members. They filled in the other 300 plus seats with visitors. Each congressional office is given a gallery pass. Senator Durbin had two guests and they were Italian restaurant owners from Chicago." (Headlines in Italy did not read: "Berlusconi Warmly Received By Interns and Restaurant Proprietors.")

What led House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) to invite Berlusconi when he did? His office wouldn't return calls for comment, but the Italian prime minister, who cemented his relationship with the Bush administration by sending Italian troops to Iraq despite strong domestic opposition, currently finds his Forza Italia party polling behind the center-left opposition in the elections set for April 9 and 10.

Despite a barrage of corruption investigations—most recently for an alleged \$600,000 bribe he paid to a British lawyer for favorable testimony in his last corruption trial—Berlusconi has remained at the helm of Italy for five years, nearly a lifetime in the tumultuous world of that country's parliamentary politics. A man with a flair for the dramatic, during his current re-election bid, he has compared himself to both Napoleon and the Messiah. "I am the Jesus Christ of politics," he told supporters in February. "I am a patient victim, I put up with everyone, I sacrifice myself for everyone." In a particularly Christ-like gesture, he's vowed not to have sex for the duration of the campaign.

As the election draws near, Berlusconi has put all of his prodigious energy into maximizing his exposure. As the wealthiest man in the country, he has plenty of money to spend on advertising, though he hardly needs to. In his capacity as businessman, he owns the three largest commercial TV stations and, in his capacity as prime minister, he indirectly controls the three state-owned TV stations. "He's everywhere," said an Italian

journalist who covers media and politics in a phone conversation from Milan. (He asked not to be identified.) "Not only in political programs, but also talking about how good he is as a father, what he used to do when he was young, his auntie ... It's like the stations are full-time campaign ads."

Berlusconi's omnipresence comes in spite of Italy's relatively strict campaign rules governing equal time. With one candidate controlling 80 percent of the country's television media, those rules are proving difficult to enforce. After the speech to the U.S. Congress, supporters of ex-prime minister Romano Prodi—the head of the center-left opposition—complained that the broadcast of the speech had violated Italian election law. The election commission, however, said it was legal.

In addition to his Washington trip, Berlusconi had planned an audience with the Pope, hoping to nab both implicit endorsements from the most powerful man on earth and the supreme pontiff. "He wants to go anywhere where people will talk about him and talk about how beautiful he is," the journalist continued. (The visit to the pope was cancelled after

Berlusconi was assailed by critics.)

Back in the Capitol, as Berlusconi reached the climax of his speech, he shifted into English and told an anecdote about a boy and his father. One day, he recounted, the father took the boy to a cemetery in Italy where American soldiers were buried. Solemnly, the father made his son swear an oath that he would never, never forget the Americans' sacrifices, that he would be eternally grateful to that country. Berlusconi delivered the punch line with gusto: "That father was my father," he whispered, "and that young man was me. I have never forgotten that sacrifice. I have never forgotten that vow. And I never will!"

The congressmen, senators, staffers, interns and restaurateurs, now all quite sure of what they heard, erupted into deafening applause. Berlusconi flashed a billionaire smile and applauded back. "It was moving," says Shoemaker. "Almost Reagan-esque."

McDermott missed the triumphant conclusion. "I didn't stay to the end. I've got things to do. When we stood up for one of the applauses, I got up and left." ■

GOP Trashed in Special Elections

A DRUMBEAT OF CORRUPTION, deficits and war dead has begun to haunt Republican candidates as they hit the campaign trail. The macabre cadence is playing more widely than just federal races: Since November, it has become the background music in a series of state special elections.

Democrats are winning, often overwhelmingly, in districts and states that have backed Republicans in recent elections. The results show that state-level progressive candidates are better poised than at any time in the past 14 years to benefit from a defection of moderate conservatives and a slight left turn in the electorate.

In central Texas, nurse and former school board member Donna Howard beat Ben Bentzin in a Feb. 14 special state House race in suburban Travis County, outside Austin. Howard's win signaled that Democrats can stand tough even in Republican-tilted districts imposed by "the DeLay-mander," a revamping of fed-



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eral districts now under scrutiny by the Supreme Court.

"People were receptive to the idea that someone was willing to talk about going into the legislature and actually making hard decisions, rather than following in lockstep with the failed leadership," Howard told the *Austin American-Statesman*. Like other Democratic triumphs of late, her 58 to 42 percent victory came in a district that broke for the GOP in '04.

The same day in Kentucky, in a race that drew media attention and door-knockers from three states, Perry Clark, a veteran and Boy Scout volunteer, took the 37th state Senate seat. He won 54 to 46 percent in a district that snakes inland from the Ohio River on the southwest side of Louisville. It too was carried by the GOP in 2004.

Labor households were galvanized by recent Republican efforts to undermine Kentucky unions through a "right-to-work" law. In addition, Republican Gov. Ernie Fletcher is under investigation for filling state jobs with cronies in violation of rules on merit-based hiring. Both dynamics boosted Clark.

Next door in Virginia, Mark Herring took a state Senate seat in the D.C. suburbs that Democrats hadn't even contested in 2002. The landslide 62 to 38 percent win on Jan. 31 sent shockwaves through the GOP, already reeling from a blow just three weeks earlier. In Jerry Fallwell's stomping ground of Lynchburg, Shannon Valentine rode to a 58 to 42 win for a seat that also hadn't drawn a Democratic challenger last time around.

Missouri, a battleground that rates as the best bellwether of presidential elections, has seen Democratic victories in conservative districts as well. In February, down in Ashcroft Country, the state's southwest corner, Charles Dake claimed a state House seat, 56 to 44 percent, that his party hadn't even sought in 2004.

Jane Bogetto got the ball rolling Nov. 8, beating the widow of the previous seat-holder in a district west of St. Louis. Bogetto, an adoptive mother of three who spotlighted her family in all her campaign mailings, faced smears trying to link her to late-term abortion and same-sex marriage. She prevailed 58 to 42 percent in a district the GOP had held for a generation.

"The hate stuff fired up the people working in my campaign, and it backfired. It just really turned off a lot of moderate Republicans," Bogetto told the *Webster-*

Kirkwood Times.

"I never thought I'd see a Democrat elected to the legislature," local political analyst John Pohlmann told the *Times*. "A lot of suburbs all over the country are starting to trend to the Democrats, mainly because of women voters."

That trend held in Minnesota. On Nov. 22, Terri Bonoff won a race for the 43rd state Senate seat in the collar communities west of Minneapolis. Once again, her 54 to 46 percent win was a reversal from the previous result, in 2002, favoring the GOP. Then, on Dec. 27, Tarryl Clark took a Senate seat in working-class St. Cloud, another turnaround from the '02 outcome. In both races, a novel coalition of environmental, housing, low-income, pro-choice and gay-rights activists used their lists and shoe leather to get out local voters. Their win not only put a hitch in right-wing plans to ram an anti-same-sex-marriage amendment through the legislature and onto the '06 ballot; it also produced a blueprint for an even better collaborative program this fall, when a U.S. Senate seat, U.S. House seats, the governor's mansion and the state House are all up for grabs.

Finally, over the past three months in New Hampshire, where GOP activists still face charges for jamming opponents' phones during the '02 campaign, candi-

dates John Robinson, Penn Brown and Jim Aguiar won special elections for state House seats in districts that were swept by the GOP just a year earlier.

Between general elections in 1992 and 1994, then-Republican National Committee Chairman Haley Barbour ballyhooed Republican wins in disparate states during the period and proclaimed a grassroots mandate against the Clinton administration. The trend foreshadowed huge GOP gains in November '94. Now this pattern is playing out again—for the other side.

—Hans Johnson

Fear of the Polish Plumber

NEOLIBERALISM'S DISCONTENTS ARE fighting back in Europe.

The "Polish plumber"—a symbol of cheap labor—became a catchphrase in France's "No" camp during its referendum on the E.U. constitution. His specter, wrench in hand, is rising again.

Since the start of the year, public opposition has foiled two attempts by the European Union parliament to pass sweeping "liberalization" laws in the shipping and service industries. Labor unions and

act now



THIS WILL GO DOWN ON YOUR PERMANENT RECORD

In the wake of revelations about government surveillance, People for the American Way (PFAW) recently launched FOIARequest.org, a Web site that allows the curious to request their government files using standards set by the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Users input basic information via a Web form, which then generates a legally binding letter for them to print, sign and mail to the FBI. Most individuals will receive a reply within 20 business days.

More than 15,000 Americans have used the site thus far, sending what PFAW calls a "strong signal" that they believe in the rule of law.

anti-neoliberal organizations like the French group ATTAC protest that corporate elites are using the European Union as a front to roll back Europe's enviable, but eroding, social welfare system.

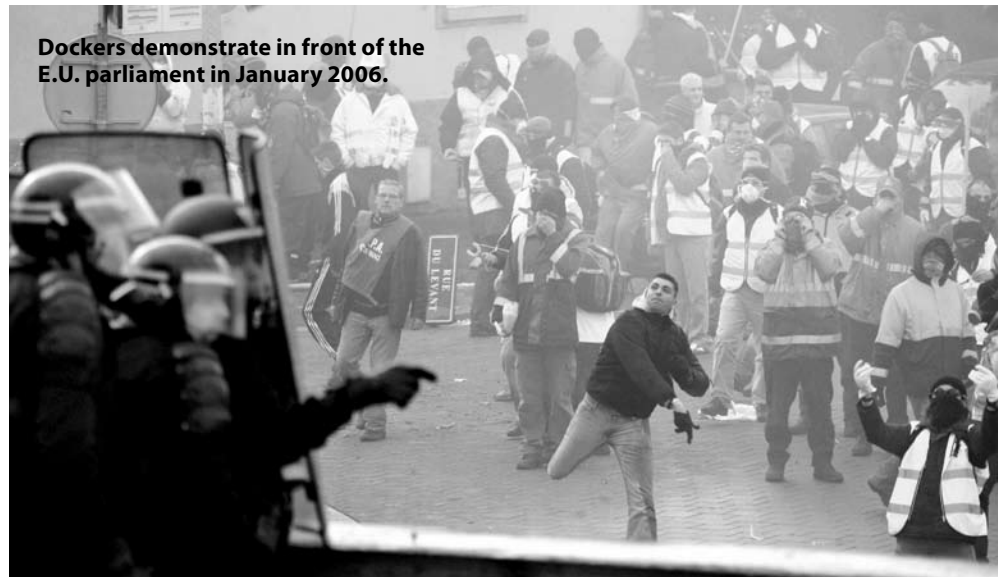
Armed with slingshots, whistles and placards, thousands of workers from across Europe descended on Strasbourg, France—headquarters of the European parliament—on Jan. 16. Inside, European lawmakers were considering whether to “liberalize” dock services across Europe. Angry workers were met by police armed with tear gas and water cannons. Sixty-four police and an unspecified number of picketers were injured. At the same time, an estimated 50,000 dockworkers in Antwerp, Rotterdam, Le Havre and other ports shut down shipping operations with a 24-hour strike. “Not one crane is moving,” said German dock union spokesman Uwe Schroeder.

The E.U. measure aimed to end monopoly cargo handling operations at many of Europe's ports—an attempt to lower costs and raise productivity and investment. Dockworkers feared that breaking up the monopolies would eliminate jobs, lower wages and raise safety risks. The protests and strike worked, as the European parliament voted 532 to 120 to reject the measure.

A month later in February, a bigger battle loomed with legislation to liberalize the E.U. service sector. The European Union's argument: Goods can be freely traded within all 25 E.U. members, but not services. Named the Bolkestein Directive (in honor of Frits Bolkestein, the former E.U. Commissioner for the internal market and industry), it would have introduced the controversial “country of origin principle.”

In theory, what opponents called the “directive from hell” would allow any company to set up shop anywhere in Europe, but operate under the laws and regulations of its home country. In practice, it would have allowed firms from eastern European countries like Poland—where wages are a fraction of those in western Europe and labor laws are weak—to operate anywhere in the European Union under Polish laws.

On Feb. 16, a massive labor-led campaign against the Bolkestein Directive paid off when the European parliament passed, by 179 votes, a version of the directive minus the controversial “country of origin principle” provision and with



Dockers demonstrate in front of the E.U. parliament in January 2006.

OLIVIER MORIN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

labor safeguards intact.

The battle over the Bolkestein Directive illustrated an East-West fissure in the European Union. Workers in the west saw it as a back-door attempt to cut their wages and erode standards. Those in the former Communist bloc viewed it as a front-door entrance to better paying jobs. Eastern Europeans have become unwitting foot soldiers for neoliberalism. Last year, the governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, declared that immigration from eastern Europe had “reduced wage inflation” in Britain.

With Bulgaria and Romania set to join the European Union in 2008, downward pressure on wages is expected to grow. And talks on allowing Turkey to join only heighten such fears, albeit mixed with a large dose of Islamophobia.

More and more Europeans don't like where the Eurocrats in Brussels are leading them.

Eurocrats know their market project is facing a credibility problem with the public. A January opinion poll showed Europeans both east and west generally cool to the European Union. But while they may be down, they are surely not out. The European Union's so-called executive branch, Council of Ministers, has the power to nix the European parliament's amendments to the Bolkestein directive and, as the E.U. parliament Web site points out, is likely to ignore the parliament's overwhelming rejection of the port directive. Such is democracy, E.U. style.

—Tony Wesolowsky

Contraception in the Crosshairs

IN MARCH, WAL-MART announced that it would carry Emergency Contraception (EC)—commercially sold as Plan B—for the first time in the seven years that the drug has been on the market. Reproductive rights activists around the nation lauded the decision both as a step forward for women's access to reproductive technology and a victory for activists fighting Wal-Mart's retrograde social policies. However, the victory is only partial, because while Wal-Mart now stocks EC, it, along with many other companies, does not require its pharmacists to dispense it.

Across the nation, pharmacists have come out as “conscientious objectors,” refusing to dispense EC, and in some cases, any contraception, to women who come in with a prescription. “If you really understand what the science of emergency contraception is,” says Destiny Lopez, head of the Institute for Reproductive Health Access’ “Back up Your Birth Control” campaign, which works to promote awareness of and access to EC, “you're essentially opposing birth control.”

Plan B, the only commercial form of EC currently available, contains a high dose of one of the hormones—progestin—found in birth control pills. As such, it prevents ovulation and fertilization. If taken within 72 hours, it can reduce the chance of pregnancy by 89 percent. That's where the problem with pharmacists comes in.

First, consider the time it takes to get ahold of a doctor or get an appointment. For a woman without insurance or a primary care physician, this can take days. Factor in transportation, securing last-minute childcare or obtaining time off work. Having overcome these hurdles, a woman could still be told to travel elsewhere to get her prescription filled. Soon the hours when EC is most effective have passed.

"It's a time-sensitive method: a woman needs to get it as soon as possible in order for it to be most effective," says Lopez. "Often, women living in rural areas only have one pharmacist they can go to in their communities."

Last November, Walgreens pharmacist John Menges refused to comply with an Illinois regulation requiring pharmacists to dispense EC. He is now out of a job, having refused a job transfer 30 miles across state lines to Missouri. "It just hurts," he told the *Chicago Tribune*. "But I'm not going to compromise my beliefs."

Menges is representative of a growing segment of the pro-life movement that opposes contraception outright. "The right-to-life movement claims that the

most commonly used forms of birth control—the pill, the patch, the IUD, aren't contraception—they're abortion," says Cristina Page, author of *How the Pro-Choice Movement Saved America*. "And they're using the same exact techniques that won the abortion debate to attack the family planning techniques that most Americans use."

"Conscientious objectors" are being backed and promoted by groups like Pharmacists for Life, whose underlying goal is to undermine women's access to birth control altogether. And the Bush administration, along with state politicians around the nation, is right there with them.

Sen. Rick Santorum (R-Pa.) has come out against birth control. "I don't think it's a healthy thing for our country," he said in 2005. Matt Blunt, the Republican governor of Missouri, conflates EC with abortion and has made decreasing access to EC a legislative priority for 2006. And the U.S. Senate is currently considering the Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act (HIMMAA), a bill introduced by Sen. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.) that would override state laws requiring health insurance compa-

nies to cover contraceptive costs.

There's another front to this battle—making EC available over the counter. In 2005 the FDA bowed to political pressure and used a "pocket veto" to table consideration of this issue. Susan Wood, then-director of the Office for Women's Health resigned, saying, "I can no longer serve as staff when scientific and clinical evidence, fully evaluated and recommended for approval by the professional staff here, has been overruled."

The fight has been picked up by members of Congress. Last summer Sens. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) blocked the confirmation of Lester Crawford for FDA commissioner until a promise was made by Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt to reconsider Plan B for over-the-counter sales—a promise he reneged on. While careful to confine their comments to the scientific rigour of the FDA, the two are continuing the fight. They answered Bush's mid-March nomination of Andrew Von Eschenbach to head the FDA with their intention to hold up the nomination until the FDA has ruled on Plan B.

appall-o-meter

7.5 Pure for Jesus, OK for Abortion

As South Dakota lawmakers considered its tough new abortion bill, which aims to outlaw the procedure except in cases where the mother's life is threatened, many wondered about the fate of rape and incest victims. Some of the bill's supporters allowed that such victims are duly considered—under certain circumstances, anyway.

A Republican state senator explained to PBS' "News Hour" that the life-threatening exception is sufficient. "A real-life description to me would be a rape victim, brutally raped, savaged," Sen. Bill Napoli said. "The girl was a virgin. She was religious. She planned on saving her virginity until she was married. She was brutalized and raped, sodomized as bad as you can possibly make it, and is impregnated. I mean, that girl could be so messed up, physically and psychologically, that carrying that child could very well threaten her life."

Cool, that's solved. Wiccan sluts may want to make other arrangements.

2.1 Polymorphous Penguin Perversity

Librarians at Rolling Hills' Consolidated Library system in Savannah and St. Joseph, Missouri, were compelled to reclassify the book *And Tango Makes Three* after it was discovered that the slender tome threatened to sow moral confusion among the youth.

The book is the story of Roy and Silo, two penguins at the Central Park Zoo in New York who adopt an abandoned egg and raise it as their own. Seems wholesome and uplifting, until you consider that Roy and Silo are both males. That's right, Tango has two daddies.

The *Chicago Sun-Times* reports that vigilant parents detected this occult outrage to natural law and saw to it that the book was taken out of the children's section. Anybody who wants to find it will have to look in nonfiction. The story, after all, is true.



7.4 Friends Forever

A mash note at the twilight of our republic:

Dear Dr. Dobson:

This is just a short note to express my heartfelt thanks to you and the entire staff of Focus on the Family for your help and support during the past few challenging months.

Jack Abramoff? Tom DeLay? Some freshman congressional winger? Read on.

As I said when I spoke at my formal investiture at the White House last week, the prayers of so many people from around the country were a palpable and powerful force.

Uh-oh, this can't be good.

As long as I serve on the Supreme Court I will keep in mind the trust that has been placed in me.

Why, oh, why was there no filibuster?

*Sincerely yours,
Samuel Alito*

—Dave Mulcahey

Speaking to the press, Clinton declared, “We want the science to decide, not the ideology.”

—Phoebe Connelly

A Legal Limbo

ABDUL HAMID ABDUL Salam Al-Ghizzawi is frantic.

“He is in very poor health, which deteriorates day after day (details to be discussed with u in person). He has a family that is in desperate need of him.”

The fragment, taken from a page handwritten by another detainee, is the only record of Al-Ghizzawi to emerge from the Guantánamo Bay prison camp in four years. For Candace Gorman, a Chicago attorney who took his case pro bono, it provides the slightest bit of hope that he may someday emerge as well.

A Libyan, Al-Ghizzawi was invisible until he passed word through other detainees that he wanted a lawyer. Dozens of new detainees became known this way last year. Gorman took his case in November.

“The fact that I’ve been representing my client for four months and yet I can’t communicate with him in any way is just ludicrous,” Gorman says.

Gorman cannot see or talk with Al-Ghizzawi without filing a protective order with D.C.’s federal district court—an agreement that warns that she can be prosecuted for sharing classified information. The Justice Department is refusing to let those agreements be filed, because cases currently before the D.C. appeals court and the Supreme Court—*Al Odah v. United States* and *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld*—will affect what rights and legal venues detainees can access. The Supreme Court decided two years ago that detainees can challenge their detention, but until the latest cases are cleared everything else—including Gorman’s emergency petition to see Al-Ghizzawi—has been sidelined.

Perversely, Al-Ghizzawi may be lucky. Recent disclosures of detainee records show not all even have habeas petitions filed on their behalf yet, says Barbara Olshansky, assistant legal director of the Center for Constitutional Rights, which is coordinating their legal fight. These motions allow prisoners to challenge the legality of their detention.

For these prisoners, legal aid may come

snapshot



CHICAGO—More than 100,000 people gathered in Chicago’s Loop on March 3 to protest H.R. 4437, which would make illegal immigrants and those who assist them felons (see p. 4). Protesters were still leaving Union Park, where the rally began, as the first marchers arrived at Federal Plaza, 2.5 miles away. (Photo by Ken Carl)

too late. The Detainee Treatment Act, passed late in 2005 as a rider to a military appropriations bill, strips detainees of their right to challenge their detention in court. The administration is arguing that it retroactively removes habeas rights for all detainees.

Even for those few lawyers who had already filed protective orders, gaining access to their clients is difficult. Some detainees have told lawyers they meet in the same rooms in which they are tortured. Meetings are videotaped, and lawyers’ notes are stripped from them before they exit the prison door. The notes are stamped “Classified,” and released weeks or months later with redactions.

Scraps of information reach Gorman this way, including the fact that Al-Ghizzawi has a brother who is a professor.

Bush administration officials called Guantánamo detainees “the worst of the worst.” But a Seton Hall law school team examined the redacted government filings against 517 detainees and found that slightly more than half have not been accused by the U.S. government of a single hostile act. The report also found that just 7 percent were apprehended by U.S. forces.

Instead, almost all detainees were turned over to U.S. custody by third parties, mostly Pakistani authorities and bounty-hunters enticed by pamphlets spread through the Middle East promising “enough money to take care of your family, your village, your tribe for the rest of your life.”

“They just paid the cash and got the person,” says John Anderson, an ex-Marine reservist and lawyer at Sutherland Asbill & Brennan whose firm represents five Yemeni detainees. “In many cases I think they were wondering what they had on their hands, and had no way of finding out.”

“What you will see [in Guantánamo] are men who are farmers, woodworkers,” Olshansky says. “They are the poorest people in the world. There’s not going to be a huge dossier on them.”

The appeals court is scheduled to hear its detainee case in March, and the Supreme Court decision is due in June. So Gorman—and Al-Ghizzawi—wait. She considers traveling to Libya to find his brother. Reluctantly she says, “That’s for another day.”

—Mischa Gaus

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

Lou Dobbs, Now More Than Ever



ONE OF THE Bush administration's overriding goals has been to discredit every institution that threatens the imperial presidency: Congress, the courts, the military, the electoral process, federal agencies and, last but hardly least, the press. Through its precision coordination of PR, spin, message saturation, fake news and demonization of any journalist who dared to ask questions as a terrorist-loving traitor, Team Bush enjoyed awe-inspiring success on this front for nearly two years, from 9/11 until the summer of 2003. Even though things started to fall apart then—no WMDs, no “Mission Accomplished,” increasingly grisly news from Iraq—the administration persisted in its take-no-prisoners stance toward the press.

Television news in particular has struggled to find its way, wounded by the “60 Minutes” debacle and forced resignation of Dan Rather on CBS, the retirement of NBC’s Tom Brokaw and the loss of ABC’s Peter Jennings. To add to the TV news woes, Fox has shown that partisan, preaching-to-the-choir news is both cheap to produce and popular. Meanwhile “The Daily Show” and “The Colbert Report” have demonstrated that so-called “fake news” is often more revealing about the day’s events, and more emotionally satisfying.

Into this gap between the lassitude of the nightly news and the edginess of Jon Stewart has stepped an unlikely figure: Lou Dobbs. I used to watch Dobbs for what are called surveillance purposes; how do right-leaning, pro-business types report and spin the news? Now, I try not to miss Dobbs, in part because he seems to be deliberately crafting a new kind of anchor persona—that of the outraged everyday American, the one who is indeed “mad as hell and not gonna take it anymore.” He expresses his incredulity over Bush pronouncements and policies in his give-and-take with CNN reporters, addresses the audience directly with sarcastic rhetorical questions and has abandoned the more neutral, objectivity-adhering stylings of news anchors. He has also been walking an interesting political line, conservative about some issues, especially American immigration policy, populist about others, including corporate giveaways and the privileging of business interests over national security. And you won’t find soft news stories about puppies or diets here. In the process, Dobbs is showing how you might do a version of “The Daily Show” straight.

Lou Dobbs seems to be deliberately crafting a new kind of anchor persona—that of the outraged everyday American.

Dobbs was merciless about the Dubai deal, and he used it as a frame through which to blast Bush about the current trajectory of his administration. How’s this for a lead-in, which Dobbs read on March 3: “New evidence tonight that the Bush White House appears to believe that commerce is more important than national security. It turns out the Committee on Foreign Investments, which is supposed to safeguard our national security interests, failed to consult anyone outside the Bush administration about this deal.” The deal provided a peg for a related story about K Street lobbyists, with which Dobbs concluded, “Business lobbyists and groups say commerce is more important often than national security interests.”

Covering Bush’s trip to India, Dobbs’ lead-in included, “The president also made outrageous remarks about the ex-

port of American jobs to cheap overseas labor markets,” and later added, “Outsourcing is just ducky, says the president.” Ridiculing Bush for saying that the solution to outsourcing is to educate Americans for 21st century jobs, Dobbs cited Labor

Department projections that the fastest growing job is that of nursing assistant. Bedpans, anyone?

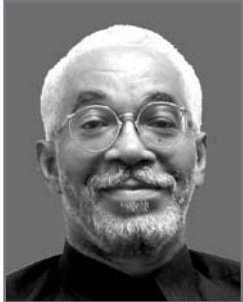
Dobbs also uses e-mails from viewers to provide a Greek Chorus to back up his own ire. A typical offering: “I have never in my 74 years seen such a lack of concern for the citizens of America by the elected officials in Washington D.C.” You just don’t see this kind of controlled fury on the networks.

On March 10, Dobbs opened his show with “The Dubai ports deal is dead, but the distortions and disinformation go on.” Beginning with Bush’s comments about the demise of the deal, Dobbs added, “The president refuses to acknowledge he made any mistakes in the way he handled the controversy. The president’s remarks are a clear sign the Bush White House is still confused about the difference between commerce and the national interest.” Ouch. Dobbs then chided that Bush was getting his comeuppance because something he has been so avidly pushing in the Middle East—democracy—“actually works here at home.”

Whatever one thinks of Dobbs’ different political stances, he is clearly seeking to keep the post-Katrina journalistic indignation alive through an anchoring style that draws more from *Network* than from Walter Cronkite. Given how the Bush administration has sought to muzzle, undermine or simply circumvent the press, Dobbs’ version of in-your-face defiance is a welcome antidote, and may be the wave of the future. ■

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

The Battle for Fred Hampton Way



IN EARLY FEBRUARY, Chicago Ald. Madeline Haithcock proposed to name one city block in honor of Fred Hampton, the Black Panther leader who died on the block in an infamous 1969 police raid. She was acting on a request from Fred Hampton Jr., who was born just three weeks after his mother survived the pre-dawn assault on the Panther apartment.

Haithcock's ordinance to name a block of Monroe Street "Chairman Fred Hampton Way" unanimously breezed through a City Council committee. After all, there are nearly 1,300 honorary street signs in the city already; a tradition since 1984, they are an easy way for aldermen to win the favor of constituents.

But a furor erupted when the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) heard of the proposal. "It's a dark day when we honor someone who advocated killing policemen and who took great advantage of the communities he claimed to have been serving," said FOP President Mark Donahue. The police union organized relatives of cops killed in the line of duty to lobby aldermen against the ordinance and several white aldermen expressed misgivings about the honorary designation.

Meanwhile, a coalition of black Chicagoans, including the city's three black Democratic congressmen—Reps. Bobby Rush, Jesse Jackson Jr. and Danny Davis—came together to urge that Haithcock's ordinance be passed. The newly formed coalition contains a wide spectrum of supporters and genuinely represents community sentiment.

Chicago's City Council will deliver a final vote in late March, after *In These Times* went to press. But the issue reveals, once again, how differing historical narratives can alter current perceptions of reality.

Chairman of the Black Panthers' Illinois chapter, Hampton was one of the group's most charismatic leaders. He organized several programs designed to demonstrate that people had power if they acted with a unified purpose.

"We organized breakfast programs, medical clinics, food depositories and other things to show the community that we could change our condition if we seized the initiative," says Akua Njeri, who shared Hampton's bed the night of the deadly raid. "It was uncanny, because he was so young to have such a powerful vision. People who came in contact with Fred were always impressed by his tremendous energy and sense of purpose."

Njeri joined the Panthers in her teens, attracted by the

group's political commitment. She said it contrasted starkly with predatory street gangs and offered a positive alternative for Chicago's black youth.

In 1968, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover announced the Panthers were "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country," and developed a counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO) to "neutralize" the group. Various police agencies, spurred by the FBI's threat assessment, began conducting raids on Panther offices across the country.

On Dec. 4, 1969, the Chicago police did their part, ambushing Panther members as they slept and claiming it was a shootout. Hampton and Mark Clark, a Panther from Peoria, were killed in the assault and several others were injured. Later investigations revealed that all but one of the more than 100 bullets fired in that pre-dawn attack were

from police guns.

Despite the fact that no one has ever been punished for the assassinations of Hampton and Clark, police are acting as if they are the aggrieved party. What's more, white Chicagoans with little knowledge of historical

context are supporting the side of those who seemingly got away with cold-blooded murder.

"The question is: whose side are you on?" said Conrad Worrill, Chairman of the National Black United Front at a news conference introducing the coalition. "Are you on the side of law enforcement agencies who want to cover up what happened or the great work of the Black Panther Party?"

Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, two college students in Oakland Calif., created the Black Panther Party for Self Defense in 1966, primarily to counter the racist brutality of the city's cops. Provoked by similar police abuse, youth in cities across the country were erupting into violent protest.

The Panthers sought to channel that rage into an organized challenge of police abuse and into delivering direct community service to those most in need. The group grew too rapidly to screen members, some of whom had ulterior motives. Some of the Panthers' tactics were needlessly provocative and provided police a perfect pretext for attack.

Njeri contends the Panthers were victims of a military defeat by counterinsurgency agents and that those efforts continue even now. She cites her son as an example. Fred Hampton Jr. was imprisoned for eight years on questionable charges and both insist they remain targets of police harassment.

As the street sign debate reveals, the echoes of that turbulent era still reverberate in a city still divided by race and class. Arguments make a lot of sense. ■

White Chicagoans with little knowledge of historical context are siding with those who seemingly got away with cold-blooded murder.

DROPPIN' A DIME

LAURA S. WASHINGTON

A Sit-Down with Studs



I'M NOT A BIG believer in the cult of personality. Neither was Jim Weinstein, the founding editor and publisher of this magazine. He was my friend and mentor. But I know Jim will forgive me if, in my inaugural column for *In These Times*, I tell you a bit about myself. I pen an op-ed column for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, the paper for the city's proletariat. You can hear me opining on NPR's "News and Notes," hosted by Ed Gordon.

At DePaul University, I proudly hold a chair named for the legendary activist journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett. I teach investigative reporting. My students keep me real.

I follow race and politics passionately. It's an honor to be invited to share those passions here. Jim would no doubt differ with some of the ideas I'll bring to these pages, and I hope you will too.

I have burning questions about The American Left. Where is it going? Who is leading it? Who should be? Who would have answers? Studs, of course. Louis "Studs" Terkel, at 93, is as Delphic as ever. We visited on a recent afternoon in the living room of his rambling brick house in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood.

On the left, "people are waiting for voices," Terkel said. Voices for "non-revolutionary change." Instead, he argued, we get pragmatists. "The most horrendous word possible." Terkel's poster boy for pragmatism is U.S. Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.), chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. Terkel dubs Emanuel the "Henry Kissinger of the Democratic Party."

So Studs, is U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.) a pragmatist? "Hillary? Of course. Hillary represents that move to the center. ... Do you know when it began? As soon as Bill Clinton OK'd the welfare reform bill. I'm no fan of the Clintons."

Would you vote for Hillary? "Would I vote for her against the Republicans? Sure. But in other words, I'll vote for a case of the whooping cough rather than cancer."

From my perch, a presidential nomination for Clinton seems inevitable. Since 2001, she has raised \$33.2 million, reports the Center for Responsive Politics.

Talk about pragmatism. It turns out that this "liberal" Democrat served on the board of the corporate behemoth Wal-Mart while her husband was the governor of Arkansas, according to the Associated Press.

Terkel says the decline of the left is the Siamese twin of the

faltering labor movement. "You cannot separate the destiny of the failed left with the condition of the labor movement," he says. "Without the labor movement there is no left."

He does see hope, however, in a "new constituency for labor" in the Third World. And "we do have women, more than ever, and people who were never organized before. Women cleaning the beds. The doormen, janitors."

We have forgotten our history. He calls it National Alzheimer's Disease.

As the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of 11 books, Terkel knows something about words. Even our language has moved to the right, he says. Take the word "liberal." "It's now a word of disapprobation," he posits. "Liberal. That guy's a liberal.' What was the phrase in the Cold War? 'Guy's a commie.' Or a commie sympathizer. Isn't that something?"

"Something called 'middle class' took over," he says. "Suddenly something called 'working class,' as a word, disappeared. It was a European word. It was almost a subversive word. If someone said 'working class,' you said 'uh uh, a commie!'"

We're all middle class, whether we got \$20,000 a year or \$200,000 a year. The labor movement now suffers tremendously, because we're now middle class."

Another word, in fact an entire era, has disappeared, Terkel says. "Depression. When I say, 'Are we going through another Depression?' people don't know what I'm talking about. Because the only depression they know is the psychic one ... like manic depression." It's as if the Depression never happened. Another symptom of our National Alzheimer's Disease.

Even as he rails against the Bushies, the ex-vaudeillian Terkel performs with style and charm. The day I dropped by, he was adorned, as always, in his trademark red-and-white checkered shirt and red socks.

The indefatigable pontificator broke his neck in a bad fall in 2004. Last year he went under the knife for open heart surgery. But he still enjoys his nip, and has the red cheeks to prove it. His curiosity keeps him going. His upcoming book, a memoir, is fittingly titled *Touch and Go*.

He's back in writing shape. He's learning to use an electric typewriter. For Studs Terkel, Google is the old comic strip. "When I hear 'Google,' I think of Barney Google. With the goo-goo-googly eyes."

Studs, stay well, and let the goose hang high. ■

Join Laura Washington and Studs Terkel in Chicago on April 20. See page 34 for details.

**I have burning questions about
The American Left. Where is it going?
Who is leading it? Who would have
the answers? Studs Terkel of course.**

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THE FIRST STONE

BY JOEL BLEIFUSS

Strangers to the Truth



COMING SOON TO a media market near you:

The GOP (Grand Old Prevaricators), who brought you the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth in 2004, have been test-marketing another TV ad campaign.

The fabrication this time: the war in Iraq. The target: any Democratic candidate who speaks out against the U.S. mission during the mid-term elections. The venue for the test is Minnesota.

Two ads have run so far. Both have caused a furor.

The first ad featured footage of the World Trade Center burning and testimony from soldiers who have fought in Iraq. Lt. Col. Robert Stephenson of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves, tells viewers: "You'd never know it from news reports but our enemy in Iraq is al Qaeda, the same terrorists who killed 3,000 Americans on 9/11." And Capt. Mark Weber of the U.S. Army Reserve ominously asks: "Where do you want to fight terrorists? [pause] We want to fight them and destroy them in Iraq."

The second featured heartfelt testimonials from parents who share the screen with giant sepia-toned images of their sons who died in Iraq. That ad says in part:

Voiceover: "September 11, 2001, the battle began on the streets of America."

Patrick Kelly, who lost his son Bryan: "These people are out to destroy us."

Chuck Larson, U.S. Army Reserves: "If we were not fighting al Qaeda in Iraq, I am convinced we would be fighting them in America and all we have to do is look back at September 11."

Merrilee Carlson, who lost her son Michael: "And thank God there are people

like Michael who would put their lives on the line for the rest of our country and our world."

Both ads conclude with this slogan, "Iraq: The front line in the war on terror."

After the first ad, Democratic Farmer Labor (DFL) Party Chairman Brian Melendez told WCCO, the CBS affiliate, "There is room for a lot of puffery in politics, there is room for spin, there is room for opinion, there is room for disagreement, there shouldn't be room for lies and this ad is about lies."

WCCO reporter Pat Kessler was more restrained. Characterizing the ads as "very misleading," he informed viewers that the 9/11 Commission had found no evidence of any connection between Iraq and al Qaeda. (WCCO ran the ads, but KSTP, the ABC affiliate, refused to do so.)

But Bev Anderson perhaps put it best. She wrote to WCCO and, as the station reported, said the ads were similar to "a tactic Hitler used ... repeat a lie often enough and people come to believe it as fact."

Though WCCO did not note the fact, she was quoting Hitler's propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, who said:

If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.

Bush himself said much the same thing, though less eloquently, on May 24, 2005, in Rochester, N.Y., when out on the road trying to sell his Social Security scam. He told the crowd gathered at the Athena Per-

forming Arts Center:

See in my line of work you got to keep repeating things over and over again for the truth to sink in, to kind of catapult the propaganda.

But will this shit fly in Minnesota? TV viewer Liz Carlson doubted whether the ads would be effective. She wrote WCCO and said, "Minnesotans can recognize bullshit even if they wrap it in an American flag."

But why Minnesota? Republicans have their eyes on the U.S. Senate seat, currently held by Democratic Sen. Mark Dayton, who is stepping down. It's the best chance they have to pick up a seat in the mid-term elections. The goal of the ad campaign is to inoculate the GOP's chosen candidate, Rep. Mark Kennedy, against any anti-war sentiments voiced by his likely opponent, Hennipen County Attorney Amy Klobuchar, a progressive Minneapolis Democrat who has the credentials of a law-and-order prosecutor. Currently, Klobuchar holds a slight lead in the polls.

This ad campaign, which so far has cost \$1 million in Minnesota alone, was made and paid for by Progress for America Voter Fund, a 527 group, which spent \$36 million in 2004 to help elect Bush.

Progress for America (PFA), the parent of Progress for America Voter Fund, was founded in 2001 by Tony Feather, the political director of the 2000 Bush-Cheney Campaign. Feather has been described by the *Washington Post* as "a close ally of Karl Rove." In 2003, he left PFA to join DCI Group, a public relations firm whose principals were involved with the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth.

These days, the PFA home page (www.progressforamerica.org) is devoted to promoting "Iraq: The Front

Line in the War on Terror.” You can go there to see the ads, which, thanks to a “saturation buy,” average Minnesota television viewers saw 22 times from Feb. 9 to 22, PFA spokesman Stuart Roy told the Chicago Tribune.

PFA is masterful at coming up with commercials that stoke the fires of right-wing populism. In 2004, one PFA ad featured Osama bin Laden and other terrorists whose photos were accompanied by the voiceover: “These people want to kill us. ... Would you trust Kerry against these fanatic killers? President Bush didn’t start this war, but he will finish it.”

Some have credited another PFA ad, which ran 30,000 times in nine swing states, with swinging the 2004 election to Bush. “Ashley’s Story” featured a photograph of Bush at a campaign rally in Lebanon, Ohio, hugging 16-year-old Ashley Faulkner, whose mother was killed on 9/11. In the ad, Ashley told viewers, “He’s the most powerful man in the world, and all he wants to do is make sure I’m safe, that I’m okay.”

The B team

On the other side of the aisle are the shining lights of the Democratic Party, James Carville, Stanley Greenberg and Bob Shrum (the consultant who ran Kerry’s campaign and shied away from confronting the Swift Boat Veterans). These three men founded the Democracy Corps, a nonprofit “dedicated to making the government of the United States more responsive to the American people.” Recall that on Oct. 3, 2002, prior to the Iraq war resolution votes, Democracy Corps advised Capitol Hill Democrats: “This decision [to support or oppose an Iraq war resolution] will take place in a setting where voters, by 10 points, prefer to vote for a member who supports a resolution to authorize force (50 to 40 percent).” In other words, Carville and friends advised Democrats to cater to public opinion and let Bush have his war.

That same year, Carville and his associates at GCS (Greenberg Carville Shrum) were working in Bolivia, as the hired guns for presidential candi-

date Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada. Their involvement in the 2002 Bolivian election is the subject of a new documentary, *Our Brand is Crisis*, directed by Rachel Boynton. In the film, Jeremy Rosner, the campaign’s pollster and chief strategist, explains their mission: “We are in this because we not only believe in democracy, but in a particular brand of democracy, which is progressive, social democratic, market-based and modern.” And Tad Devine, who is in charge of advertising, tells Sanchez de Lozada, “We must own crisis and we must brand crisis.” In other words, GCS was planning to use Bolivia’s economic crisis to the campaign’s advantage.

Sanchez de Lozada won the June 2002 election, defeating Manfred Reyes Villa, a former military strongman, and Evo Morales, Bolivia’s current president. It wasn’t meant to last though. Sanchez de Lozada was overthrown the next year by a popular uprising.

Questionable character

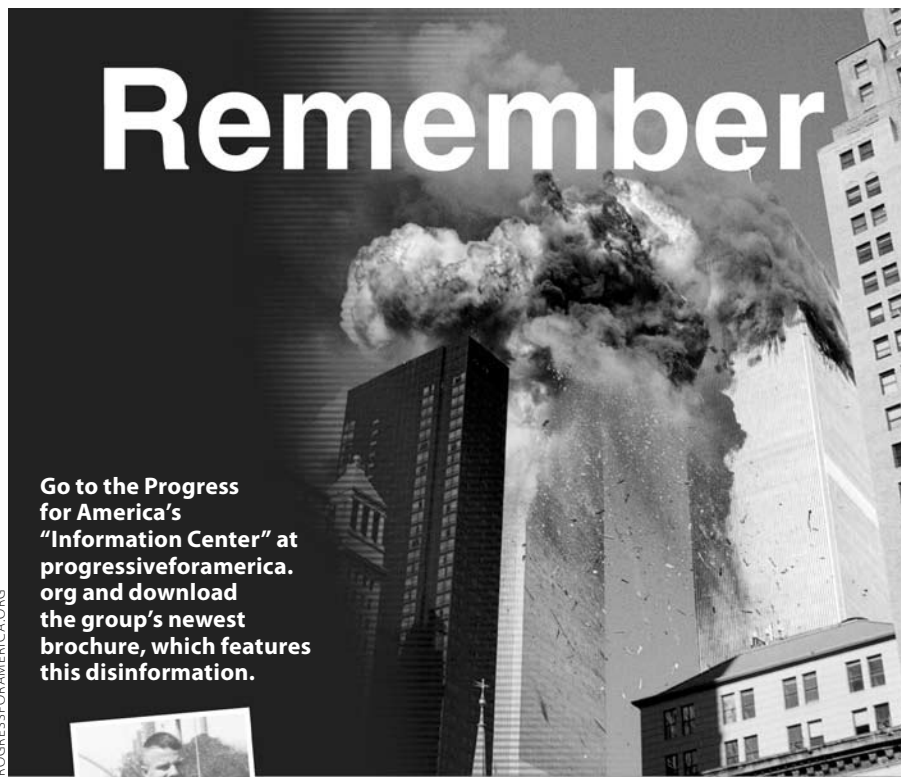
In Arizona, the attorney general’s office is investigating state treasurer David Petersen for “theft, fraudulent schemes and practices, and conflict of interest,” reports Phil Riske in the *Arizona Capitol Times*.

Petersen was featured in Silja J.A. Talvi’s January cover story “Cult of Character.” She reported how Petersen, standing at the podium of the “Building Cities of Character” conference, bragged about how his state’s Family Services Committee passed “Character Education legislation.”

“All schools now have it implemented,” he said. “We’re fighting for the soul of this nation.”


Now Petersen is fighting in court. According to Character First!, which sponsored the conference, Petersen was paid \$4,000 in commissions for selling Character First materials to Arizona public schools. It is also alleged that he billed the state for travel costs associated with Character First! His former secretary, Wanda Simeona, in a December 2005 letter of resignation, charged, “You go all over the state teaching about Character and charge the state mileage.”

Petersen has since announced he will not seek re-election. He is now waiting to see if criminal charges will be filed. ■



Remember

Go to the Progress for America’s “Information Center” at progressiveforamerica.org and download the group’s newest brochure, which features this disinformation.



“If we weren’t fighting al-Qaeda in Iraq, we’d be fighting them in America.”
— Chuck Larson, Major, U.S. Army Reserves

PHOTO COURTESY OF PROGRESSFORAMERICA.ORG



POLITICAL

UPHEAVAL

BY NADIA MARTINEZ

Latin America challenges the Washington Consensus

THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACES OF Latin America are famous for their imposing Spanish colonial grandeur. Not long ago these marble edifices on grand plazas were inhabited mostly by military strongmen. That these leaders were elites of European descent went virtually without question.

Today, Chile's presidential palace, La Moneda, is the home of a single mother and torture survivor. In Buenos Aires' famous Casa Rosada lives a man who is perhaps the biggest thorn in the side of the International Monetary Fund. In Bolivia it is an indigenous coca farmer, in Brazil a metalworker and in Uruguay a former leader of left social movements who call these palaces home.

In election after election, Latin Americans are choosing leaders who promise a shift from traditional elite-driven politics to more participatory and active democracies that focus on fulfilling the needs of the poor. With nearly a dozen national elections coming up this year, including especially significant ones in Mexico and Brazil, this is an important time to assess how far the new leaders of Latin American politics, diverse as they may be, are likely to go in achieving real change. And at a time of virtually one-party rule in the United States, the prospects for real democracy in Latin America offer an intriguing model for the rest of the world.

Under the U.S. radar

To the extent that U.S. officials have paid any attention to the new Latin American leadership, it has been largely fixated on Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. In February, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld played the Hitler card, describing Chávez as "a person who was elected legally—just as Adolf Hitler was elected legally—and then consolidated power and now is, of course, working closely with Fidel Castro and Mr. Morales and others." Other U.S. officials have used Chávez' fiery attacks on President Bush to raise the specter of a

Cuban socialist model being imposed by Chávez and his new allies throughout Latin America.

In general, however, Latin America is low on the Bush administration's radar screen. Although the U.S. government was deeply involved in Latin America during the '80s, providing military and other assistance to governments fighting internal civil wars, successive administrations have been less concerned with the region since the fighting there stopped. The war in Iraq has pushed Latin America even lower on the priority list.

According to Adam Isacson, a senior policy associate at the D.C.-based Center for International Policy, U.S. military assistance to Latin America has not dried up. Rather it has been refocused "to fight the war on drugs and efforts to maintain close contact with the militaries of countries that are lifting trade barriers, privatizing and pursuing laissez-faire economic policies."

By pulling back from direct political involvement in the region, the U.S. government created an opening for Latin American social movements of small farmers, trade unionists, human rights activists and urban poor to organize and elect new leadership. Their efforts have been bolstered by the failure of the policies that the U.S. government has pushed in the region—fighting drugs and expanding free market reforms. On drugs, the U.S. government's attempt to crack down on Latin American suppliers was key to the rise of Bolivia's newly elected president, Evo Morales. A native Aymara and leader of the country's coca farmers union, Morales is a staunch opponent of U.S. coca crop eradication programs. Although the coca plant is used to produce cocaine, for Bolivians coca in its natural form is as much a part of their culture as coffee is to ours. His courage to stand up to the United States in defending the rights of coca farmers made him a national celebrity even before he went into politics.

In February, shortly after taking office, Morales urged the United States to change its drug war

policy in Bolivia. He said, "The [U.S.] zero-coca policies haven't worked. ... We don't want a false drug war." Then, during Chile's presidential inauguration in March, Morales gave Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice a traditional Bolivian musical instrument called the *charango*, decorated with coca leaves—a symbolic reminder that coca farming is legal in Bolivia.

The U.S. coca eradication efforts in Bolivia and elsewhere have had little to no effect on cocaine use at home or on coca cultivation. Sanho Tree, a fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies, explains that after the United States put the squeeze on Bolivia and Peru in the early '90s, coca cultivation exploded in Colombia. Now, after five years of hammering at Colombia, production is moving back to Peru, Bolivia and other countries. "The drug war hasn't been able to solve this balloon effect," he says. "In fact, constricting global supply simply creates greater financial incentives for more *campesinos* to plant coca, and in a region where there is so much poverty, we will never make coca disappear by making it more valuable. Morales' victory should be occasion for Washington to re-evaluate its failed drug war rather than to propagate alarmist rhetoric."

While he is committed to pushing for a political program that will benefit the poor and indigenous populations that make up the majority of Bolivians, Morales has shown consistent respect for the democratic process. Morales is the first indigenous president in Bolivia's 180-year independent history. With 54 percent of the popular vote, he's also the first president ever to win an election with a clear majority in the first voting round, starting his term with a strong mandate and high expectations.

Backlash against World Bank and IMF

Morales also got a huge boost from U.S. support for the policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Following on the heels of the Reagan-era's "trickle-down" economics, which posited that benefits for the rich will "trickle down" to the rest, Washington has used its power of the purse and its leading position within international lending institutions to guide Latin American governments toward economic policies that restrict public spending, increase the role for the private sector, and dismantle the system of import taxes and other tariffs in order to facilitate international trade.

Lending agreements from the IMF and the World Bank during the '80s and '90s came riddled with conditions for countries to manage fiscal deficits by lowering government spending on social programs, including health and education.

"Cutting public expenditures by any large degree cannot be done without affecting the poor who rely on public services, or provoking huge rebellions," says Jim Shultz, director of the Democracy Center in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

Yet in 2003, the IMF demanded Bolivia cut more than \$250 million, or 8 percent, of the national budget. In *Deadly Consequences: How the IMF Provoked Bolivia into Bloody Crisis*, Shultz details how the Bolivian government tried to warn the IMF that this would incite popular unrest. Bolivians deposed two presidents in as many years through protests against these types of policies and then elected Morales.

Argentine President Néstor Kirchner also owes much of his success and popularity to his resistance to the IMF. Since assuming office in 2003, Kirchner has been a tough negotiator with the IMF. He has resisted demands to slash spending, lift controls on public utility prices and implement banking and tax reforms, and instead he has pushed for investment in the public sector and protection of Argentina's poor.

Argentina, once the poster child of the IMF, has made a remarkable comeback since its economy collapsed in 2001 after a decade of closely following IMF and World Bank prescriptions. While in 2000 growth was a negative 0.8 percent, growth from 2003 to 2005 under Kirchner's watch exceeded 8 percent, with low inflation and falling unemployment and poverty. Consequently, Kirchner now commands a stunning 80 percent approval rating in opinion polls.

Brazil, too, has reaped considerable benefits from its government's determination to balance external pressures to adopt a cautious macroeconomic strategy with internal demands for higher standards of living for all Brazilians. Economic growth in 2004 was the highest since 1986, with gross domestic product (GDP) increasing 5.2 percent.

The U.S. government's aggressive push to expand free trade in Latin America also helped catapult other new leaders into the presidential palaces. Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva in Brazil made his opposition to a proposed hemispheric trade deal, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) a centerpiece of his 2002 election campaign, calling it an "annexation agreement" rather than an integration agreement. He then helped lead resistance to the FTAA among other wary developing countries, resulting in a deadlock for the past several years. Likewise, in Costa Rica, opposition candidate Ottón Solís nearly pulled off a stunning upset in that country's February election, thanks to his popular position against the Central American Free Trade Agree-





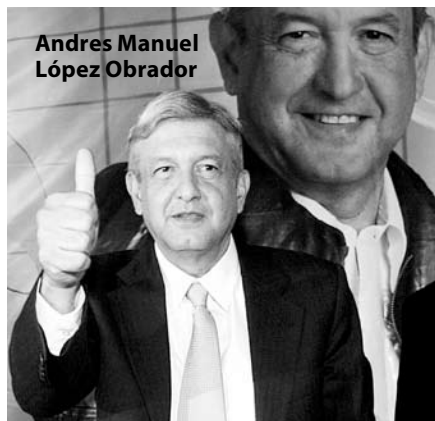
Michelle Bachelet



Hugo Chavez
and Evo Morales



Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva



Andres Manuel
López Obrador

ment (CAFTA). CAFTA passed the U.S. House of Representatives last summer by only two votes.

Lula and Solís were riding a wave of widespread outrage against the failure of trade and investment liberalization policies (often called the "Washington Consensus") imposed on the region since the '80s. No region of the world had gone further to adopt these reforms, and yet, while promoters argued this would lead to prosperity, Latin America has experienced rising poverty and inequality. The World Bank estimates that the number of Latin Americans living on less than \$2 per day increased from 99 million in 1981 to 128 million in 2001. According to the United Nations, the gap between rich and poor has continued to grow and Latin America has the most unequal wealth distribution of any region in the world.

The democratic opening that occurred after the infamous era of military dictatorships allowed social movements to express their discontent. The traditional conservative elites who were aligned with the United States were voted out, and replaced by socially minded, left-leaning leaders.

Right versus Left?

It is somewhat simplistic to characterize the changes taking place in Latin America as purely right versus left, but it is undeniable that there is a general shift toward the left. However, in Latin America the political spectrum is relatively wide and what are considered left governments vary greatly from country to country. Their common thread is that they all support state involvement in pursuing economic and social policies focused on improving the lives of the poor.

For example, Bolivia's Morales has pledged to regain national control of partially privatized state enterprises, like the energy industry. Chile's new president, Michelle Bachelet, campaigned on a platform of continuing her predecessor's free market policies, but promising to increase social benefits in order to reduce the country's gap between rich and poor. During her inaugural speech on March 12, Bachelet vowed to "reach the year 2010 with an extensive social welfare system."

Both Venezuela's Chávez and Uruguay's Tabaré Vázquez are self-proclaimed socialists, but Chávez is a far more aggressive opponent of U.S. trade

and investment policies, once calling the proposed FTAA "the cauldron of hell itself." He has also plowed massive amounts of government money into health and education programs, part of what he calls "socialism for the 21st century." On the other hand, Vázquez has thus far kept fairly intact the Washington-friendly economic policies he inherited, and recently signed a bilateral investment deal with the Bush administration. Unlike oil-rich Venezuela, Uruguay is constrained by a massive debt burden, equivalent to roughly 90 percent of its gross domestic product. Likewise, Bolivia is the second poorest country in South America, and part of the World Bank's highly indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative to reduce external debt. Morales will likely face similar restraints in his choices for revenue allocation—whether to increase teachers' salaries or make debt payments is not an uncommon choice for Latin American presidents.

The wave of the future

Nearly a dozen national elections are slated to take place this year in Latin America, and candidates of the left are leading contenders in many of them. Two elections in particular have important implications for the United States: Mexico and Brazil. Together, they are home to 60 percent of Latin America's population and represent more than two-thirds of economic power in the region.

Mexico shares a 2,000-mile border with the United States and is the country's largest trading partner in Latin America. This year's presidential election, scheduled for July, is only the second since 2000, when the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was voted out after 71 years of undefeated rule. The candidate of the left, Mexico City Mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has been the front-runner since the start of the official campaign season in January of this year and continues to lead in the polls.

According to David Brooks, U.S. bureau chief of the Mexican daily *La Jornada*, the election is particularly key for the United States since so many pressing issues on the U.S. domestic agenda, such as "agricultural trade, narco-trafficking, and energy policy, are really international issues, and have to do with Washington's relationship with its southern neighbors, like Mexico."

López Obrador has pledged to block attempts to open the oil and gas industry—which is state-owned—to private investment. This is a controversial issue for President Bush, whose pledge to shift the U.S. oil reliance away from the Middle East depends on Latin American exporters like Mexico remaining loyal to their number one client. Ensuring that American oil companies have access to

lost on Mexican political hopefuls, who have routinely campaigned in Chicago and other U.S. cities even before the large communities of Mexican immigrants there were allowed to vote.

When current Mexican President Vicente Fox came into office in 2001, he managed to get Bush to promise to overhaul the current immigration legislation, and to strike a deal with Mexico

implicated in the scandals, many feel he should have done more to fight corruption. There is also considerable disappointment that he has not gone further to follow the example of his neighbor in Argentina to challenge the IMF. Nevertheless, the former union leader's victory in 2002 is still widely viewed as a decisive step in the direction of stronger democratic rule in Brazil.

Public opinion polls in Latin America consistently show people's preference for a break with Washington. Many think the United States is largely to blame for their increasing poverty.

Mexico's huge reserves would make that job much easier.

It is also the first time in Mexican electoral history that citizens living outside the country will be able to vote from abroad. This adds a potential four million outside voters just this year, 85 percent of whom are living in the United States and have tremendous influence back home. Last year, Mexicans sent over \$20 billion to their friends and families in Mexico.

"Depending on how you measure it, remittances are the second or third revenue stream for Mexico, after oil exports and tourism," says Brooks. "Mexicans in the United States care about what happens at home." This point has not been

on special work programs and possible amnesty for undocumented immigrants. The Bush administration has failed to do either, which will likely have a high political cost for Fox's party, the National Action Party (PAN), to the benefit of López Obrador.

In Brazil, Lula is seeking another term. Although he has been critically weakened by a series of corruption scandals in his Workers' Party (PT), the latest opinion polls show him in the lead. This year, the PT's main contender is the more conservative Social Democratic Party of Brazil (PSDB), which governed from 1994 to 2002.

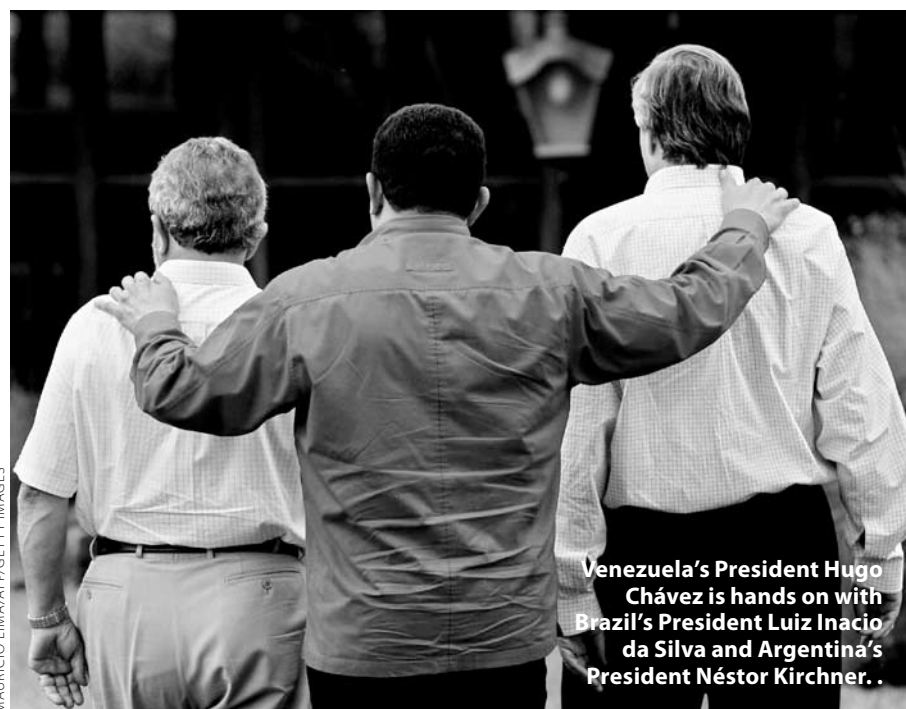
Although Lula has not been personally

"Whether or not Lula wins again is not what's important," says Atila Roque, a Brazilian citizen and executive director of ActionAid USA, an international development agency based in Washington D.C. "The point is that people are deciding now who best represents their interests, so if the left doesn't perform they'll be removed too. That's incredible democratic progress."

Neighborhood problem

Latin America's rejection of Washington's favored model of economic management has caused strained relations with the White House. Public opinion polls in the region consistently show people's preference for a break with Washington. Many Latin Americans think that the United States is largely to blame for their countries' increasing poverty and inequality.

Anti-American sentiment has also risen since the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the scandals of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo. Public sentiment holds that the United States is not following international norms and is not playing by the rules, as other countries are expected to. According to the Pew Global Attitudes Project, a series of world-wide public opinion surveys, "rising anti-Americanism is not confined to Western Europe and predominantly Muslim countries." A recent Pew survey shows that while 52 percent of Brazilians expressed a favorable opinion of the United States in 2002, by 2003 that number had dropped to 34 percent. In the minds of many, the Iraq war has only confirmed the worst stereotypes about U.S. militarism, unilateralism and



Venezuela's President Hugo Chávez is hands on with Brazil's President Luiz Inácio da Silva and Argentina's President Néstor Kirchner.

MAURICIO LIMA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

imperialism. A sense of mistrust toward American corporations doing business in Latin America is also prevalent.

"The U.S. government's decision to attack Iraq has been a critical factor in the growing disdain for the U.S. in Latin America," says Fabian Pacheco, an advisor to Abel Pacheco, the outgoing president of Costa Rica. "We're seeing increasing popular pressure on the few governments who still support this war to distance themselves from the U.S."

The Bush administration should be paying close attention to what is happening in Latin America, without repeating the mistakes of the past. It should define a clear policy for the region that is based on supporting democratic processes and institutions, and should seek to ensure that democratic governments like that of Evo Morales in Bolivia succeed. The United States should be more tolerant of those leaders who do not necessarily toe Washington's line, and show that it is committed to democracy, regardless of what candidate the people choose. After all, economically suc-

cessful neighbors make reliable trading partners, and politically stable governments make good global allies.

Still, it remains to be seen if the New Left in Latin America will be able to overcome the endemic problem of poverty by fashioning bold solutions in Bolivia and beyond.

Efforts such as Argentina's attempts to work more closely with Brazil, Venezuela and others are hopeful signs. Last year, Kirchner paid off the last of its debt to the IMF, with the help of Venezuela. Other countries, such as Ecuador and Bolivia are also trying to break free from the shackles of the IMF, with help from their neighbors. It's just a start, but this may give governments a little breathing room to deal with urgent issues of poverty and misery in their countries.

Roque of ActionAid explains that if the United States doesn't allow the space for governments to experiment with alternatives, such as increasing social protections or promoting national industry, it will be preparing the ground for all kinds of dangerous re-

percussions. Any attempt by Washington to tie the hands of these new leaders when they make economic decisions they believe are in the best interests of their people will only increase public frustration, and that can lead to extreme populism, from the right or the left. Although not a bad thing *per se*, populism can be used to promote radical ideologies that claim to represent the majority of the population.

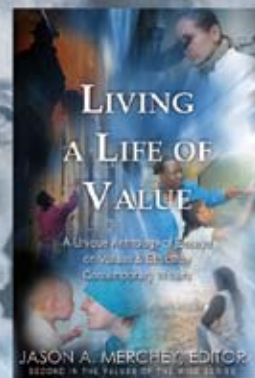
To Roque, expanding and consolidating a strong democracy is more critical than whoever resides in Latin America's presidential palaces. "Democracy must go beyond elections of the president and the parliament," he says. "Democracy is the freedom to make innovative economic decisions that will improve people's lives." ■

NADIA MARTINEZ was born and raised in Panama. She is co-director of the Sustainable Energy and Economy Network (www.seen.org), a project of the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington (www.ips-dc.org).

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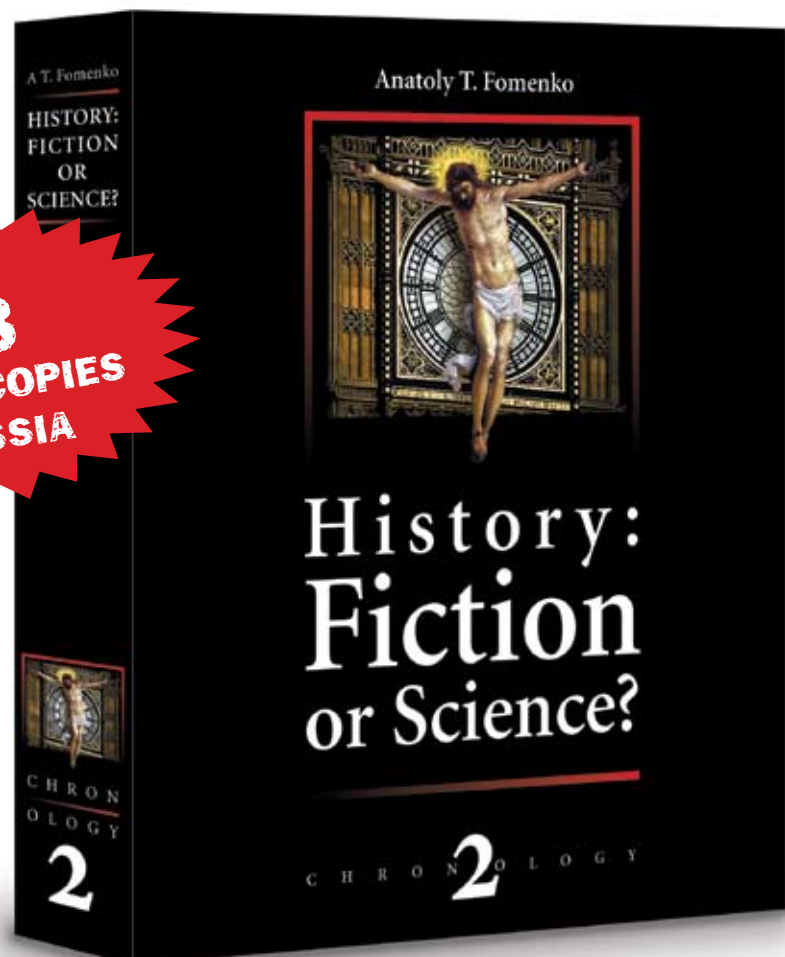
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To protest the construction of two giant paper mills, environmentalists have blockaded Rt. 136, one of the main roads connecting Argentina and Uruguay.

MIGUEL ROJO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Pulp Non-Fiction

A paper mill at the border of Argentina and Uruguay causes massive protests

BY KELLY HEARN

STELLA MARIS SQUEEGEES RAIN off International Route 136, a two-lane highway on the border of Argentina and Uruguay, currently blocked by tents, tractors, grain trailers and logs.

"I have been here for 11 days straight," says the 46-year-old Argentine mother-turned-environmental activist, one of a handful of people camped among soy-bean fields, cow pastures, pine trees and eucalyptus stands. "I have had to leave behind everything, my job, my kids, everything. I didn't care at first but then I started listening and realized it was worth it."

The cause of her new mission is located 10 miles up the road, on the banks of the River Uruguay, a natural border between the two countries. On the Uruguayan side, a Spanish and a Finnish company are building two of the world's largest pulp mills near a sleepy river port town called Fray Bentos. Supported by Greenpeace and Jorge Busti, the provincial

governor here in Entre Ríos, Maris and some 1,500 people from the nearby city of Gualeguaychú, Argentina, are demonstrating against the mills as a looming environmental disaster.

Making paper requires bleaching a brownish pulp with chlorine or chlorine dioxide, both of which cause environmental damage. Though company officials and Uruguay authorities say the plants will use technologies that make it chlorine-free, environmentalists aren't convinced and believe the plant's exhaust will cause cancers and kill plants and animals.

In protest, they have blocked Route 136 and another key border crossing, turning back traffic that ranges from tourists to Chilean cargo trucks. The blockade is generating economic tremors in Uruguay, transforming a homespun environmental protest into a regional crisis. Governments are posturing as activists hunker down. Tabaré Vázquez, a popular former doctor and Uruguay's first socialist president, has called on his Argentine

counterpart to force an opening.

Argentine President Néstor Kirchner, a socialist up for re-election next year, balked for weeks. On March 11, however, the presidents made a shaky truce, promising to halt construction of the plants and to lift the blockades for 90 days. As *In These Times* went to press, the conflict was unfolding by the hour. Gualeguaychú's protestors were unfazed by the truce and on March 13, *La Nación*, a popular Argentine paper, reported a potential new twist: Unions at the plants were thinking of taking them over to ensure their jobs weren't lost.

The presidential agreement was preceded by weeks of diplomatic wrangling. The Kirchner government, with support of the Argentine Congress, had threatened to take the matter before the International Court of Justice at The Hague. For its part, Uruguay sent a delegation to Washington on Feb. 24 to meet with the Secretary General of the Organization of American States (OAS). And Vázquez even threatened to leave Mercosur, a four-nation trading block formed by Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and Peru, if the free flow of goods and people wasn't restored.

The \$1.9 billion plants represent Uruguay's largest foreign investment. Spain's Grupo Empresarial is building a facility to produce 600,000 tons of eucalyptus pulp annually. The facility of Finland's Oy Metsä-Botnia AB and Kymmene Corp will produce one million tons annually.

What's more, both pulp mill companies have a stake in Uruguay's booming and controversial monoculture forestry program, which has turned millions of acres into commercial tree plantations with help from World Bank and Uruguayan government subsidies. In 2003 Botnia bought a 60 percent stake in the Uruguayan forest cultivation company, Compania Forestal Oriental, which at the time owned 48,000 hectares of land in the west of Uruguay, of which at least 32,000 hectares contained eucalyptus forest planted on grassland. Likewise, Grupo Empresarial has a stake in the forestry company Eufores, which has at least 40,000 acres of plantation.

Meanwhile, the noose tightens around little Fray Bentos, where not far from the construction zones bony horses munch weeds along rusted railroad tracks and locals sip *yerba maté* in the town square. Mayor Omar Lafluf says the roadblock has hit hard, but that the plants have already

brought in 6,000 construction jobs and plenty of collateral goodies like 300 new houses, an expanded pier, two logistical centers and the major remodeling of a hotel. Other locals at a recent town meeting complained of layoffs and cutbacks, vacant hotel rooms and empty restaurants.

But Martin, a 56-year-old cab driver from Gualeguaychú, stands firm. "We are in the hot zone," he says. "If they build those plants, the contaminants will be in the river, the air, the animals and the people. It will kill our environment."

Uruguayan and company officials argue that monitoring and technology will keep things safe. "The pulp mill will not produce any biological impact on the environment," Bruno Vuan, a Botnia spokesman, wrote in an e-mail. "Botnia has experience in operating pulp mills in Finland, a country with the best environmental ratings in the world. As in Finland, in Uruguay we will apply the best available technologies according with the latest European Union regulations."

Vuan says Botnia's mill is slated to be the most modern in the world, and that his company has "carried out detailed environmental studies with the best

Uruguayan and Finnish experts, studies that have been reviewed and approved by Uruguayan authorities."

But Uruguayan authorities aren't sleeping on Route 136. Those who are say they have been shown no proof of safety precautions and they fear that once the mills start, any related contamination will not be able to be stopped. As a result of the dispute, historically friendly relations are now sliding downhill. One 65-year-old Argentine at the blockade says she has family in Uruguay, and considers the two countries to be brothers. She says the issue is about the environment. But for Erica, 23, a Fray Bentos resident laid off from her job as a shop attendant thanks to the blockade, it's more personal. She and her family say local Argentines have gotten aggressive, and that Uruguay is too often kicked around by Brazil and Argentina.

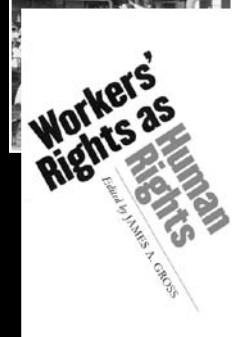
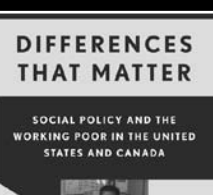
Does the recent presidential handshake mean a way out of the impasse? Experts say bilateral talks are the only solution because the OAS will not intervene without a request from both parties in a conflict, and The Hague will not rule on hypothetical claims of future environ-

mental damage.

For now, tensions continue to mount despite the diplomatic overtures. While activists and editorialists pitch suggestions to solve the crisis, the Argentine protesters keep performing as a well-oiled grassroots democracy. Though the number of hardcore, round-the-clock protesters dwindles to as few as a dozen, supporters ferry supplies throughout the day and nighttime crowds still swell to more than 1,000 as families leave work, bring out barbeque and the kids, and meet as the Gualeguaychú Citizens Environmental Assembly. "There is no hierarchy," says Martin of the assembly. "There are no leaders. It is purely democratic. We come out and we have an agenda for the day, which is usually how long the blockade will last. Then we vote."

As this day's assembly closes, the resolve behind those votes suggests that Ms. Maris and her squeegee will still have plenty more time to kill. ■

KELLY HEARN is a writer based in the United States and South America. He is a former UPI staff reporter and the recipient of the 2006 Samuel Chavkin Grant for Investigative Journalism.



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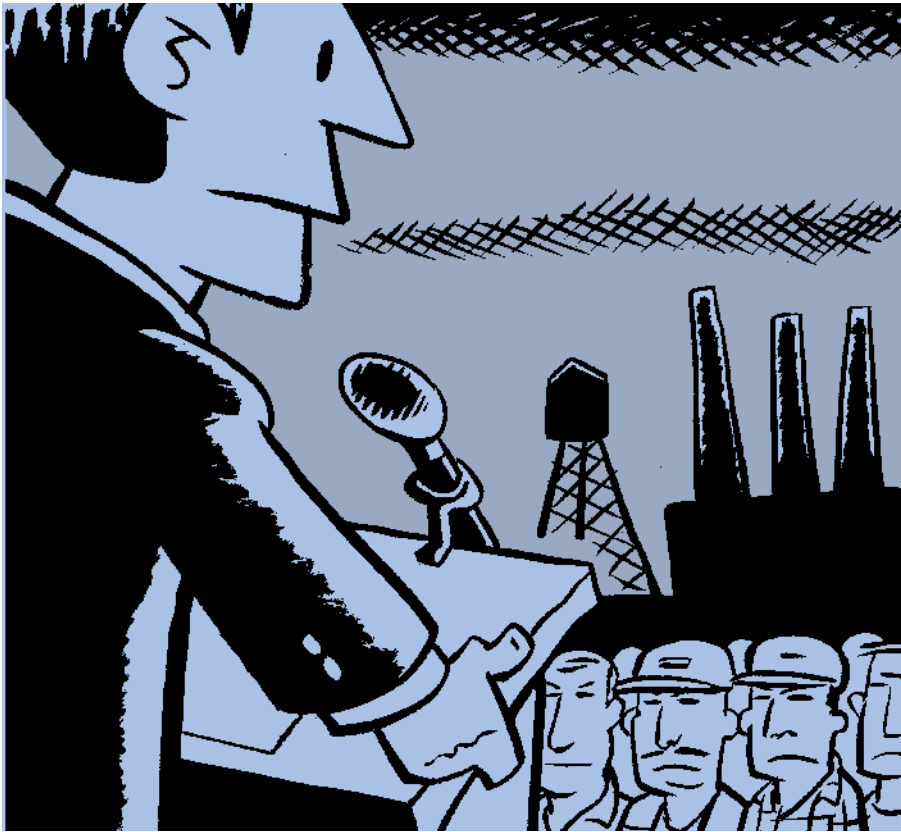
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A Primary Concern

Free Trade could be key for Democrats in '08

BY DAVID SIROTA

UNDERNEATH THE GLUT OF stories about the now-failed proposal by a Dubai-owned company to buy major American ports was something that every 2008 Democratic presidential candidate would be well-advised to note. No, it wasn't a new resurgence of "racism," as many pundits in the corporate media claimed. After all, there was plenty of evidence showing that America's national security apparatus had very concrete concerns about the deal. And no, it wasn't merely that America wants better homeland security (although it is true—we do).

What the scandal showed was that Americans are sick and tired of "free" trade policies that prioritize corporate profits over all other economic and national security concerns. As workers' wages stagnate, the U.S. trade deficit grows and more of our country's assets are sold off to the highest foreign bidders, that concern is only going to become

more prevalent in electoral politics.

This will be especially true in the early 2008 Democratic presidential primaries. In the three key states—Iowa, South Carolina and New Hampshire—trade is a major hot-button issue. A December 2003 Pew poll of these states showed that roughly 62 percent of voters said recent free trade agreements had either not helped or actually hurt their families. That sentiment has only gotten worse.

Iowa

Iowa has long been a state where trade policy is integral to Democratic primary politics. It is, after all, the state that Rep. Dick Gephardt (D-Mo.) famously won in 1988 after making his opposition to free trade the major theme of his presidential campaign. That focus on trade has only gotten more intense as deals like NAFTA and China PNTR (Permanent Normal Trading Relations) have savaged wages, jobs and benefits in the heartland.

Take the 2004 Democratic primaries. As the caucus season heated up in October 2003, the *Boston Globe* noted just how angry many Hawkeye State voters were over U.S. free trade policies. "Across Iowa, trade is a bubbling political issue, asked about with regularity and great solemnity at campaign stops stretching from the Nebraska-to-Illinois border," the paper wrote. "Agriculture is king in Iowa, but union workers at construction sites and farm equipment plants ... account for one-third of the participants in the state's Democratic caucuses."

Four years later, the state is getting squeezed even further. In its report on the "State of Working Iowa," the Iowa Policy Project notes that Iowa's recent loss of thousands of good-paying jobs has been "driven partly by the recession, but also by the impact of global trade on high-wage manufacturing in Iowa, the upper Midwest, and the nation." It notes that Iowans participating in retraining programs for workers displaced by free trade are making, on average, only 62 percent as much as the jobs they lost.

This suspicion about our current free trade policy may even be found in the agricultural sector. Traditionally, this is the sector that has most supported of free trade because agricultural products are one of the few export commodities with which our country still maintains a trade surplus. But Roger McEowen, an agricultural law and economics expert at Iowa State University, recently told the *Waterloo Cedar-Falls Courier* that politicians' rhetoric about the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) is inaccurately raising farmers' expectations. "Since what the [low-wage, trade partner] countries buy is so trivial and with their buying power, the benefits will be slim to none," McEowen said. "NAFTA hasn't lifted up prices, so CAFTA certainly won't do it."

South Carolina

In 2004, Danielle Vinson, a political scientist at Furman University, told the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "South Carolina is a microcosm of what NAFTA and free trade have done around the country. ... There's no denying that the textile mills here have really suffered because of free trade."

Vinson's words are matched by the data. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, South Carolina has lost more than 71,000 manufacturing jobs since

2001. That a loss of more than one in five manufacturing jobs, with the textile and apparel industries being particularly hard hit from imports manufactured by cheap labor in China.

This is why even South Carolina Republicans like Sen. Lindsey Graham stake out positions challenging Washington's corporate-backed consensus on trade. It is why, in 2004, South Carolina Rep. Jim Clyburn (D) called the trade issue "the sleeping giant" in his state. With America's job-destroying trade deficit continuing to fuel a glut of imports, South Carolina's "sleeping giant" will probably awaken again in 2008.

New Hampshire

On trade, New Hampshire, the first primary state, mixes both blue collar and white collar concerns about corporate-written free trade deals. Like other New England states, its manufacturing base was decimated under NAFTA and China PNTR. Since 2001, the state has lost more than 25,000 manufacturing jobs, or one quarter of its manufacturing workforce.

The effects of those job losses have been brutal. A 2004 study by the nonpartisan Economic Policy Institute found that industries expanding in New Hampshire pay roughly 35 percent less than industries that are contracting. That is among the largest gaps of any state in America.

But trade policies really get interesting with New Hampshire's large white-collar

workforce. According to the American Electronics Association (AEA), the Granite State has among the highest percentage of high-tech workers in the country. These workers, once natural proponents of free trade deals that open up markets for export goods, are now learning that technological advances mean their jobs can be exported, too. As a recent AEA press release noted, "New Hampshire's tech industry has weathered a heavy storm," having lost 7 percent of its workforce in 2003 alone. That has left many New Hampshire workers fearful for their jobs and frightened of the kind of mass outsourcing that is being encouraged by America's free trade policy.

As proof that free trade is growing as a political issue in New Hampshire, consider the bold move of Gov. John Lynch (D) in May of 2005. Five months into Lynch's term, the *Manchester Union Leader* reported that the new governor wrote to the Bush administration and officially reversed "former Gov. Craig Benson's (R) support for several recent or pending free trade agreements." Considering Lynch's previous career as a successful businessman, his move was particularly revealing on how trade now cuts across both partisan and demographic lines.

How the candidates stack up

Key to discerning how trade will play out in 2008 is an understanding of how the current crop of potential Democratic

presidential candidates breaks into four distinct categories on the issue. The first category is the ardent free traders. These are people like Gov. Bill Richardson (D-N.M.), who shepherded NAFTA through the House when he was in Congress; and longtime and loudly outspoken free trader Sen. Evan Bayh (D-Ind.), a proud member of the Democratic Leadership Council, which has pushed every major free trade pact in the last decade.

Then there are the people who have tried to have it both ways but whose devotion to free trade orthodoxy has been well-documented. These are people like Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-N.Y.), who supported NAFTA, WTO and China PNTR; Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.), who did the same; and Gov. Mark Warner (D-Va.), who also supported NAFTA and WTO (though did not support the China deal), and reiterated to the *New York Times* in March that he is committed to free trade.

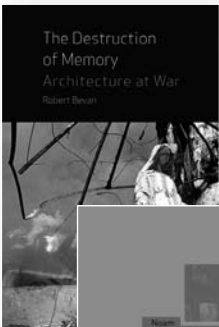

The third category is candidates with mixed voting records on trade, but who have displayed a genuine interest in rejecting the free-trade-at-all-cost dogma. The only candidate in this category is former Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.), who voted against some of the corporate-written trade deals that came down the pike during his Senate term, and who has made a class-based "Two Americas" message his signature theme.

And the final category is candidates who have opposed all of the trade deals, even when that opposition has been politically unpopular. This too is a one-candidate category, and that candidate is Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wisc.)—a lawmaker who has lashed his public image to the issue by airing ads in his Wisconsin Senate races about his courageous stands against free trade pacts.

As the early presidential jostling has started to pick up, some candidates in the first two categories have made moves to address the growing anger over free trade. They seem to sense that trade—along with the Iraq War—could be an explosive wild card in 2008. If it is, the candidates in the first two categories are rightly worried, and are rightly trying to amend their records. Because if Edwards, Feingold or another as-yet-announced candidate makes an indictment of free trade central to their campaign, they will be tapping into exactly the kind of intense outrage that fuels successful insurgent candidacies. ■

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Hotel Workers' Rising Tide

A "Movement for Equality" tops UNITE HERE's agenda

BY DAVID MOBERG

CALL HIM EDUARDO. A legal immigrant from Mexico in his early twenties, Eduardo lives in a basement bungalow apartment in a modest blue-collar suburb of Chicago. He works full time in one big, city-center hotel as a houseman, supporting the women who clean the rooms, and part-time in another as a banquet waiter. He doesn't want his real name used, not because he's done anything wrong, but because he would like to have a union at work. And a few months ago when some co-workers at his hotel began organizing publicly, the leaders were fired.

"The bosses don't respect us," he says, explaining why he secretly continues to help organize. "They treat us like slaves. We have our integrity. We have to get paid better, get better benefits. Also, they don't have consideration for nobody. Every time, they expect you to do more than yesterday."

Eddie Sims would understand. He's a houseman at the Chicago Hilton and Towers, where as a shop steward in the union he regularly files grievances over management efforts to increase the work-

loads of housekeepers and cut back on staff. Nearly four years ago, after the Chicago local had undergone two years of reform, it won a 37 percent pay increase for room attendants, lifting wages to \$12 an hour this spring and greatly reducing what workers had to pay for their health insurance. That victory prompted most big non-union hotels, such as Eduardo's, to raise their pay—though not to unionized levels—just to keep the union out.

This year, the Chicago Hilton contract is up for renewal, as are contracts at other major cities including Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, Honolulu, Boston and San Francisco where UNITE HERE represents a large share of hotel workers. Hotel workers in those cities have gone without a contract for more than a year and a half. Like the rest of the 60,000 UNITE HERE members at more than 400 hotels, Sims hopes the results of this year's negotiations will improve his life.

"We need more pay," he says, as he explains how staff cutbacks have increased his workload. "We're not getting enough for the work we're doing. We not only do our job but everybody else's job, too."

But Sims also hopes that negotiations this year can help bring people like Eduardo into the union. "It's very important to me," he says. "We've got a lot of people in the hotels that are non-union, and that makes it tough on people in the union to make the work better if we go out on strike."

He also wants other hotel workers like Eduardo to share some of the less tangible, but equally important, benefits of being in a union. "I feel I can't be touched by management when the union is behind me," Sims says. "When I face them, I have no fear. I'm fighting for my rights and my people, trying to make a better world."

EDUARDO AND EDDIE are two faces of one of the most ambitious union campaigns in recent decades to make that better world, an effort by UNITE HERE to campaign simultaneously for hotel workers who are in the union and those who are not—or at least not yet. Under the slogan "Hotel Workers Rising," the union is trying to create a "movement for equality" that will make the quality and rewards of work in the vast, low-paid ranks of the service sector a central issue of public morality in American politics.

"It's not just about these workers, but the kind of America we live in," former Sen. John Edwards told the 2,000 hotel workers and allies gathered at Chicago's luxurious Drake Hotel for one of the campaign's opening rallies on Feb. 17. "I don't know about you, but I don't want to live in an America where we have a few rich people and everyone else. So we are joined together in a just, moral and righteous cause."

With this campaign, UNITE HERE is also trying to adapt itself to better confront a dramatically restructured hotel industry. In the past, hotels were mostly owned and operated by local investors, and contracts were negotiated for local urban markets. But today, most hotels

Actor Danny Glover speaks at a UNITE HERE rally on February 16, in Los Angeles.



DAVID MCNEW/GETTY IMAGES

are part of large global chains with complex relationships between the hotel operator, franchisor and owner. Whatever the structure, control of the industry has shifted to global corporations, leaving the union stuck with local contracts.

Starting four years ago, UNITE HERE began bargaining so that as many of its contracts as possible would expire this year. Although the union will still negotiate contracts city by city, the local unions and the international are working together to plan contract demands and strategy. UNITE HERE will also be appealing for special support from its partners in Change To Win, the labor federation that broke away from the AFL-CIO last year.

If, in the coming months, the companies put up stiff opposition, more and more city contracts could expire and remain open. The San Francisco contract has remained open since 2004, following a strike, a lockout and a boycott of many hotels that continues today. If hotel management continues its resistance until this fall, the result could be worker actions in many cities simultaneously—the potential equivalent of a full-blown national strike.

But at the moment, John Wilhelm, president of the hospitality division of UNITE HERE, is offering the industry an olive branch. “Our challenge to the American hotel industry is to join with their employees and our union to take advantage of a wonderful opportunity to figure out how to make service sector jobs, particularly service sector jobs that cannot be exported, into jobs that can rekindle the middle class dream in our society,” Wilhelm says.

Manufacturing jobs in the steel and auto industries were only good jobs after they were unionized, Wilhelm argues. Global economic forces are either moving those jobs out of the country or making them worse, but hotel jobs can’t be moved.

Despite a downturn after 9/11, which the industry used to slash its workforce, the hotel industry is now quite profitable. But hotel workers aren’t sharing the bounty. Hotel work has never been easy. The injury rates for hotel workers are among the highest in the service sector. More than three-fourths of housekeepers report work-related pain, most of it serious enough to see a doctor or take time off, and two-thirds regularly take medication for pain caused by stress

and overexertion at work.

In recent years, the stress of hotel work has increased with the “amenity war” among luxury hotels. Starwood, the proprietor of Sheraton, Westin, W and other brands, kicked off the competition with its “heavenly beds,” made of far heavier mattresses and more pillows and bedding for workers to handle every day. As the number of items in the room grows and the attention to detail becomes more

Luxury hotels cater to the top 10 percent of the population, which has captured half of all income gains over the past 35 years.

persnickety, the workload increases for housekeepers.

“They say, ‘We are changing the rooms to make them more nice, more beautiful for the guests,’” says Elena Ortega, a housekeeper at W Hotel in Chicago. “Yes, it’s more beautiful, but they don’t think, ‘It takes more time to clean the rooms.’ It’s fine for the companies, but it’s too much work. We don’t take breaks. We don’t take lunch. If we don’t finish, maybe they fire us.”

The pay hardly compensates for the pain. Some tipped workers in big hotels, like banquet servers, doormen, waiters and bartenders, can make comfortable incomes, but the average hotel housekeeper in the United States makes \$7.85 an hour, not enough for a full-time worker to rise above the understated official poverty level for a family of four, now set at \$18,850 a year.

THE NATION’S FULL-SERVICE hotels represent a microcosm of the growing inequality in the United States. With their amenity wars, these luxury hotels cater to the top 10 percent of the population, which has captured half of all income gains over the past 35 years, according to a recent study by Northwestern University economists Ian Dew-Becker and Robert Gordon. On the other hand, workers in non-union hotels are part of the population that over the past quarter century has seen almost no increase in after-tax income.

Unions can still shift the distribution of power and wealth. A housekeeper in San Francisco, where about 90 percent of hotel workers are unionized, makes \$15 an hour, compared with Boston and

Chicago, where 50 to 60 percent are in unions and the average wage is \$12 to \$13 an hour, or Atlanta or Phoenix, where very few are unionized and wages are \$8 to \$9 an hour. The room rates are similar at every Hilton or Sheraton. The difference lies in the degree of unionization.

“The greatest anti-poverty program in American history is the organized labor movement,” Edwards told the cheering hotel workers in Chicago, significantly

revising the venerable Democratic applause line that the best anti-poverty program is a job. An unofficial presidential aspirant, Edwards called for “real labor law reform,” swift and severe punishment of labor law violators and neutrality on the part of employers so workers can “decide without interference” on whether to join a union.

That’s where the second part of Hotel Workers Rising enters. In the past five years, UNITE HERE has organized more than 12,000 new workers, mostly in full-service, big city hotels, where the union is strongest. But even once a majority of workers had signed membership cards, it still took hard fights to pressure hotel managers to recognize the union. Yet in an industry with 1.4 million workers, where less than 10 percent of all hotel and motel workers are unionized, UNITE HERE wants to organize faster and on a much greater scale.

Union strategists have long indicated that this year they would like to win national agreements from hotel chains to remain neutral and simply check union cards for recognition. The hotel industry has geared up to fight for elections as more democratic than card check.

UNITE HERE has persuaded hotel operators to be neutral in a variety of ways. In both San Francisco and Boston, for example, hotels have agreed to neutrality in certain new developments or after acquisition of properties, and in many cities, UNITE HERE has managed to make neutrality a condition for operators of hotels built as part of publicly subsidized projects.

Wilhelm now says, “We’re not especially concerned about the details of the

process, but we do strongly believe that workers should not be subjected to harassment and intimidation if they want to join a union."

In a presentation to a group of Wall Street analysts, Wilhelm emphasized that the union wanted above all to establish a cooperative relationship with the Hiltons and Starwoods of the industry, but their top executives wouldn't even meet with him. "There is more money to be saved on cooperative undertakings in health care, worker compensation and training than to be won by either side in adversarial collective bargaining," he argued.

He also told analysts that a cooperative relationship was necessary to deliver the customer service that the luxury hotels see as essential for winning upscale business and leisure customers. "The hotel industry, led by Starwood, has changed from an industry selling beds and meals to one selling an emotional experience," Wilhelm said. "It can't deliver or extract the charges it wants without involving workers. A luxury lifestyle can't be delivered by people in poverty."

But many of the hotel giants show little interest in cooperation, especially Hilton. "We have to be particularly persuasive or find other ways to make them recognize it's the smart thing to do," says Chicago local union president Henry Tamarin. "We say we want to be partners, but that doesn't mean they'll leap into our arms. Negotiations are not won by rationality of arguments. This has to do with the balance of power."

This year, the union's efforts to link union and non-union workers could help tip the balance in its favor. In Los Angeles, organizing campaigns at five major hotels, including two Hiltons, have gone public. Seventy to 90 percent of workers in these hotels have signed petitions calling for a new strategy for the industry, including a fair process for

union recognition. The union has mobilized community and political supporters, who see better pay for hotel workers as crucial for both economic development and social justice. And it has enlisted union workers fighting for a new contract in the work of organizing new workers. The drive is drawing high-profile supporters; at the February launch of the Hotel Workers Rising campaign in Los Angeles, Wilhelm, actor Danny Glover and Los Angeles city attorney Rocky Delgadillo walked through the LAX Hilton, talking with employees and then rallying in the cafeteria.

But, fundamentally, "the link is between workers," says Los Angeles organizing director Kurt Petersen. "Housekeepers in one Hilton property clean three more rooms than another; one has health insurance, and the other doesn't. The link becomes clearer when they talk one-on-one. There's this consciousness that as one Hilton worker does better, we all do better."

As the contract fight progresses, other organizing drives will go public, boosting both the contract fights and organizing drives. "This strengthens our union's commitment to turn this into a movement," says San Francisco union president Mike Casey. "Unless the industry understands ... we're becoming a movement of hotel workers across North America, we're not going to be able to deliver improvements for our members and workers outside the union."

Although key items like wages, benefits and work rules will be negotiated locally, the union hopes to engage top corporate executives in discussions about crucial policies. For example, Wilhelm wants hotels not to dismiss immigrant workers while the workers are trying to resolve immigration issues. At the same time, UNITE HERE is backing the Kennedy-McCain immigration reform bill that is also supported by the hotel industry. But UNITE HERE also wants the hotel industry to commit to hiring more African-American workers, so they can take advantage of worker gains in the industry. Other national topics could include union rights beyond employer neutrality in organizing, such as the right to honor picket lines or to play a role in selecting uniform and laundry companies (which could help UNITE HERE in its drive to organize industrial laundries, especially the giant Cintas).

ULTIMATELY THE UNION's campaign will only reach full potential if it becomes a broader movement that challenges the growing inequality in American society. Such a movement must give force to the widely shared sense that everyone who works is entitled to a life that reflects the wealth of this country—a comfortable home, universal health care, high quality public education from child care through college, secure retirement and, most important, a "living wage." Although the union campaign's top priority is uniting all hotel workers, Casey argues, it "should extend well beyond our sector of the economy."

Hotel Workers Rising feeds into local movements for a living wage and state campaigns for a higher minimum wage, including initiatives in at least six states this election year. With the support from the mayors of San Francisco and Los Angeles and presidential hopeful Edwards, UNITE HERE hopes to push economic inequality more toward the center stage of American politics, making economics a moral issue, not just a technical matter to be sorted out by the marketplace.

The hotel worker campaign faces some formidable obstacles. Take wages: Unions were able to raise manufacturing wages—until they were undercut by globalization—partly because manufacturers could invest in new technology to boost productivity. But in the services sector, there are fewer opportunities for increasing productivity. As a result, service unions will need to rely less on contracts with employers to create the middle class American dream for their workers and more on the creation of universal social programs, like national health insurance and strengthened public pensions. And those new programs will have to be financed with taxes that explicitly redistribute more equitably the growth of the American economy without regard to a specific job or employer. But for this to succeed in the era of globalization, all of organized labor will have to head in that direction.

Emmanuel Asare, a 39-year old immigrant from Ghana who works two full-time hotel jobs to support his family, understands the concept of broader solidarity very well. "It's very important for me to organize more hotel workers so we can come together as a big union, a united union, so we can stand up," says Asare, a Chicago union member. "Without that, the companies don't offer anything." ■

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RACE RIOT?

It's far too easy to pin recent violence in the L.A. County Jail on ethnic tension

BY SILJA J.A. TALVI

LOS ANGELES—WHEN THE NATION'S largest jail system erupted in violence on Feb. 4, officials thought they would quickly bring the situation under control. L.A. County Jail correctional officers are trained in forms of riot control, and regularly drilled in the art of jail combat, complete with S.W.A.T.-style protective gear and access to an arsenal of lethal and “non-lethal” weaponry.

But this wasn't the kind of inmate uprising that jail officials expected. For the better part of a month, inmates throughout the sprawling L.A. County Jail system tangled with one another in small-scale scuffles and large-scale battles. By late February, two dead inmates and hundreds of injured inmates later, jail officials believed they had finally contained the riot. But then violence broke out again on March 1, sending black and Latino inmates to the hospital. It seems unlikely to be the

last episode of violence.

Most reporters covering the story embraced the “race riot” label, stressing that the animosities between African Americans and Latinos in jail had finally reached a fever pitch. But as the family members of inmates and a variety of civil rights and religious organizations tried to point out, focusing on the color and “raza” of warring inmates missed the larger picture: an overcrowded, overburdened and often dehumanizing method of incarceration.

Keeping the ‘savages’ apart

According to many jail and prison officials—L.A. County Sheriff Lee Baca included—race and gang segregation is an important tool for keeping high-violence-prone inmates out of situations where they can hurt or kill each other, as well as

keeping guards as safe as possible in a dangerous environment.

The unintended result, however, is that segregation by race often forces members of one ethnic group into a gang-dominated setting where they must follow a predominant gang's rules and expectations—or face severe retaliation. Combined with limited opportunities to exercise, study or participate in any kind of counseling or vocational training, the situation amounts to a recipe for disaster.

"These fights right now are the result of an interracial war, Latinos against African Americans," Baca told National Public Radio on Feb. 13. "That's a gang-related problem from South Central Los Angeles."

Baca's comments highlight serious gaps in his comprehension of the situation on the streets of Los Angeles. For one thing, intra-racial gang violence is far more likely in any neighborhood than are skirmishes between ethnic groups, whether it's the Norteños vs. the Sureños, or the Bloods vs. the Crips. For another, these problems are not limited to South Central Los Angeles. But apparently it's still easier to point the finger toward that part of L.A. County than to acknowledge the presence of gangs from Venice to East Los Angeles, Long Beach to Hollywood, and everywhere in between.

A nuanced understanding of gang life and culture is sorely lacking on the part

of both the jail system and the press. L.A. gang culture—and Southern and Northern California gang culture more broadly—has become so entrenched that it has become intergenerational, with 65-year-old grandfathers doing time alongside their 20-something grandchildren. In many neighborhoods, it is expected that young adult men (and many young women) will be born into or gravitate toward one "family" or another for the sake of protection, identity, social status and the opportunity to participate in various illicit income-generating projects. Gang life offers family and community protection, a sense of identity and even steady employment in a city that otherwise affords little such stability to its poorest residents.

But these motivations are lost on political leaders who seem more comfortable dealing with the situation in terms of "containment," rather than providing people with the education, jobs and respect they would need to escape the pitfalls of gang culture.

Interracial tensions between gangs do exist, but they are nowhere near the top of a gang's priorities for taking care of their own. What happens when thousands of gang members—and unaffiliated petty criminals and substance abusers—are thrown into overcrowded jail dormitories doesn't reflect the reality of L.A.'s rough street life so much as it creates an even uglier, more twisted life of its own.

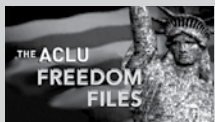
A blunt instrument

As the rioting continued throughout February, officials put many jail inmates into lock-down: round-the-clock confinement to cells and dormitories. Inmates were unable to bathe, do laundry or visit with friends and family. In many jail facilities, lower-security-level dormitories where men of various ethnic backgrounds were previously able to room together were disbanded in favor of what could only be described as "race grouping."

While such segregation was more extreme during the month of rioting than on a normal working day at the jail, the practice itself is nothing new to the L.A. County Jail system—or the California state prison system. In February 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that California had to abandon its state prison policy of automatically assigning new inmates to segregated cells, on the basis of their



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ethnicity, for as long as 60 days. The case, *Johnson v. California*, challenged the state to prove it had no “race-neutral” way to prevent interethnic violence. A similar lawsuit launched against Baca’s practices could bring an end to them in the L.A. County Jail system.

In November 2004, a confidential report prepared for the L.A. County Board of Supervisors warned of the potential for serious trouble if ongoing, long-term practices of racial segregation, compounded by overcrowding, weren’t addressed. Six months prior to the report, five inmates had already been killed over gang or race issues, although not under riot conditions.

In the first week of the rioting, the ACLU of Southern California issued a statement to the media explaining that while ethnic segregation may be a necessary strategy once violence has already erupted, it is largely ineffectual as a long-term approach. Instead, the ACLU suggested more reliance on multifaceted rehabilitative efforts, careful integration of inmates, fewer prisoners and more modern facilities.

“[F]or years we have been advocating the County Board of Supervisors and Sheriff Lee Baca and his department for increased staffing, better access to medical care for inmates, improved conditions for everyone inside the jail and an end to the overcrowding that plagues the jails,” says Ramona Ripston, executive director of the ACLU of Southern California.

The practices of many prison and jail officials sometimes worsen pre-existing tensions. Rose Braz, director of the Oakland, Calif.-based prison-reform group Critical Resistance, put it this way: “Corrections departments have long used racial segregation and the pitting of prisoner against prisoner as a means to quelling any prisoner solidarity, much less prisoner organizing.”

“A prime example here in California was what happened at Corcoran State prison just a few years ago,” says Braz. “A federal investigation confirmed that guards were setting up fights among prisoners, called ‘gladiator’ fights, and then betting on them. A prisoner was actually killed by a guard under the guise of trying to halt one of these fights.”

The L.A. County Jail has not been the only prison in California to witness the escalation of gang-based violence. In January, the FBI announced it would begin to investigate the use of so-called

“peacekeepers” by correctional administrators and guards to help maintain an always-tenuous institutional pecking order. This practice involves guards relying on toughened long-timers to help keep the newcomers in line. The FBI became involved after the stabbing death of a Chino prison guard by a “peacekeeping” Crip, and the murder of an inmate dur-

What happens when thousands of gang members are thrown into overcrowded dormitories doesn’t reflect L.A.’s rough street life so much as it creates an uglier, more twisted life of its own.

ing an altercation started by a white supremacist murderer who had also been accorded status as a Sacramento prison peacekeeper.

Voices from the inside

Ironically, the first week of the L.A. County Jail riots coincided with the fourth and final meeting of the Commission on Safety and Abuse in America’s Prisons. Held at Loyola Marymount University on Feb. 8 and 9, the conference brought together dozens of jail and prison officials, judges, researchers, corrections industry officials, program coordinators and international experts to testify about prison issues.

By far, the most powerful testimony during those hearings came from those who had lived the experience, inside and out.

“Prison was a breeding ground for my violence,” Pernell Brown, a Gang Specialist with the Community of Colors Program in Portland, Oregon, told the commissioners on the first day of the hearings.

Brown joined the Bloods as a young man, and eventually served seven years in prison for assault with a deadly weapon. Once in, Brown continued selling drugs, “banging,” and working on finances with the “shot-callers” in both white and Hispanic gangs.

“Prison made me bitter, not better,” Brown added. “The mentality or belief that ‘once an inmate always an inmate’ is alive and well inside the institutions.” The men who cycle through jail and prison systems, he continued, are regularly subject to callous, abusive, degrading and invasive treatment.

Daniel “Nane” Alejandrez, executive director of Santa Cruz’s Barrios Unidos and a former inmate, called for jail and prison systems to bring in more cultural, spiritual and educational programming—akin to what his national organization has been offering since 1977 to gang-affiliated teens, as well as current and former inmates.

Acknowledging gangs and gang culture in jails and prisons doesn’t mean leaving inmates to fester in segregated cells and dormitories, Alejandrez said, after the hearings. Instead, this is the most opportune time to reach them with education, counseling, training and vocational opportunities. Over the decades, Alejandrez says he has witnessed profound changes in the lives of those afforded even the smallest of opportunities.

“To see individuals change before you, for the betterment of human kind,” Alejandrez told the commission, “is a blessing and hope for the future.”

The Commission on Safety and Abuse in America’s Prisons is set to release its findings in the spring, including a likely recommendation that jails and prisons can indeed alleviate violence by avoiding large-scale, upon-entry segregation along ethnic lines. But, as Braz points out, a more multifaceted approach toward inmate populations and to rehabilitation and the lowering of recidivism rates has to start with “reducing the number of people in prison.”

“There are simple, modest ways—sentencing reform, parole reform, drug treatment—to dramatically reduce prison populations today,” she says, “if only there [existed] the political will or courage to do it.”

Without that political will, citizens must brace themselves for more violence. As long as we are content to allow jail officials to implement a prisoner-management philosophy akin to color-separating inmates like so many loads of laundry, we can be assured of only one outcome: more violent spasms of misdirected rage. ■

BY ANNIE ANDERSON

Broke Cowboy

For folks like Samuel K. Beaumont, Sr., this year's Defense of Marriage Acts, set to appear in November on ballots in Alabama, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Idaho, Virginia and Wisconsin, do more than legislate the definition of marriage.

They perpetuate a cruel injustice that Beaumont knows well.

The documentary film *Tying the Knot* chronicles the five-year legal battle Beaumont waged to keep the Bristow, Oklahoma ranch that he and partner Earl Meadows shared for 24 years. When Meadows died in 2000, a gaggle of his long-lost cousins went to court and evicted Beaumont from the 80-acre ranch, taking at once his home and livelihood. Despite Meadows' notarized will—which left his estate to Beaumont—and what Beaumont calls the couple's "marriage," Oklahoma courts bestowed the estate to the Meadows family.

Life ransacked, resources depleted and hope gone, Beaumont still remains in the lurch where *Tying the Knot* found him back in 2004. *In These Times* caught up with the 62-year-old rancher to talk about what has transpired since the film's completion.

While gay marriage continues as a hot button issue, your story is also interesting in light of the buzz surrounding the movie *Brokeback Mountain*. What do you think about the national conversation this film has spurred?

I have not seen *Brokeback Mountain*. I probably won't 'til it comes out on DVD. But I feel akin to it.

As to marriage, they should take marriage and put it back in a church where it was to start with and separate the state from it. If you've been with somebody for

all them years, it doesn't matter whether you're both male, both female, or male and female. If you're together, common law marriage, or whatever you want to call it, should work.

Do you think gay marriage will be legalized soon?

I think someday. It's just like the segregation thing was. It's gonna hit the straws. It's got to be done to have everything equal for everybody—equal rights. The Constitution provides it. It's just getting the darn people who are dragging their feet out of the way. If we hadn't had this president, it probably already would've been done. But the worst enemies that we have are the ones that's in the closet. And the ones that believe all of a sudden they get religion and they ain't gay no more. Heck, if you're born that way, you're born that way. Ain't no changing it. You can get religion all you want to—the good Lord made you and he ain't gonna change you.

You have been affected by your inability to lawfully wed Earl ...

I think the term is "screwed." I lost the estate. It was an 80-acre ranch. It had four houses on it. And of course I had cattle, horses and all that. It cost me a lot of money that I couldn't afford. The attorney told me that he'd take the case for \$5,000, and when I got through I was paying about \$33,000 and he still wants another \$8,000. And I got nothing.

And I'm still fighting them over my

property here, in Cromwell, where I live. Now the estate wants me to sell part of it to pay \$13,000-something for taxes and \$5,000-something for the lawyer—their lawyer.

Although your union with Earl was never recognized by law, you considered yourself married. Did you have a service?

It was private between us. That was in July of '77. We had gotten together on January 15, so it was six months to the day because it was July 15. We met on a pier out on the Arkansas River. I was sitting there watching the water and the fish go by and he come up behind me and started talking. We got to talking and we talked 'til 2:30 or so in the morning. And then I went home and he went home. Next night, we met at my house.

Did your family and friends know you were gay?

I came out to everybody when I come back from Vietnam in 1969. You mature a lot when you don't know if you'll wake up the next day and live. One day at a time, and you live it to its best. You learn a lot of things about yourself that you didn't know before. 'Course I knew it. I've known it all along, I just didn't know what it was. And so I came out then. I'm sure Earl knew it before he was married, knew it when he was growing up. The thing was, you grew up, got married and had kids.

You and Earl raised three sons from your previous marriage. Did your family ever face discrimination in Bristow (population 4,300)?

There wasn't nothing like that against us. We got along good. Most of the upper crust of town Earl knew well. They didn't care and we didn't push it on them. Most of them had known Earl most of his life. He was born in Bristow. He'd went to school



Samuel K. Beaumont

with them, college with some of them. We never had any problems.

You had custody of your three sons when you met Earl. What did they think of Earl?

They liked him. And Earl thought the world of them. He always said they were his boys—all five of 'em. The three of mine and the two that we kind of adopted along the way. They treated him like a father and he treated 'em like they were his sons, at company Christmas parties and all that stuff. Carried 'em on his insurance—he was a comptroller for Black & Decker—just like any parent would do.

What did your family think of your relationship?

My folks never said a word against it and Earl's didn't either. As far as Earl's parents were concerned, the kids were their grandkids, the only ones they ever had. His mother was the typical grandmother. Spoiling kids. They'd come home from school, and they'd go stop over at her house, which was between ours and the bus stop, and she would give them a snack and then they'd come on home and they wouldn't eat no supper. So we told 'em, "You can't stop over

there." And what'd she do? Stands in the yard as they come by and gives them a snack and a Kool-Aid in a cup, and let them go on. That away, they didn't stop. Typical grandma.

There's a scene in *Tying the Knot* where your son Kennegth gets choked up talking about Earl. How has his death affected your sons?

Well, they were a little lost for a while. It just takes time to get over it, for them as well as for me. It's like my mother said—I asked her, 'cause she lost my dad, "Does it ever get better?" and she said, "Well, I don't know if the pain ever gets better. You just learn to live with it, which makes it a little easier."

Tell me about when Earl's cousins took you to court.

The judge in the Oklahoma district court had the legal right to rule either way he wanted to, and he didn't do it. He didn't have the balls to do it, as my attorney said. He could have ruled the will was legal. It was notarized—and nobody disputed the signature. They knew it was Earl's. He said it only had one signature besides Earl's and that was the notary public's. And he said it needed another signature.

Was this an excuse for him to end the case, to dismiss it?

Just to send it over. He knew it was causing a feud, and he thought that when it got to the appeals court they'd rule in my favor, but they didn't. The U.S. Supreme Court wouldn't hear the case. That's pretty much it. There's nothing I can do after that. That was the end of the road for me.

How have you been able to support yourself financially?

Other than ranching, I haven't worked since me and Earl was together. He didn't want me to. All I done was run the ranch and raise cattle, stuff like that. I'm having a little trouble because they took all my money. It was in the account, it was in his name, so they took it. I had to file bankruptcy. I didn't have much choice, 'cause I just couldn't afford the bills and they took all my money. And I had to sell everything, so I had to file bankruptcy. It was final in September. The insurance and the 401K, I was the beneficiary on that, so it didn't go into the estate and they couldn't touch it. They tried, but that's what I bought this place with, with the money from the 401K. I bought this house, this ranch, which is a house on 350 acres. Between that and the lawyers, it pretty much wiped it out. It cost me a lot of money that I couldn't afford.

Have you received any financial help from anyone who's seen *Tying the Knot*?

No. Just a few little donations here and there. Not that much. I hadn't asked for anything. I could use it, sure, 'cause I'm hurting bad. Living month-to-month, very tightly. And I still got a house I'm trying to remodel.

It's hard when you got an 18-year-old mind and a 60-year-old body. I always tell them I'm older than pepper and about the age of salt. My birth certificate says I'm 62. Some days I feel it, some days I don't. I figured if I'm not listed in any obituaries in the morning paper, I'm doing fine. Got another day.

Even so, you've been through some dire straits for the past 5-and-a-half years.

A nightmare and a living hell. I hope I wake up. ■

ANNIE ANDERSON is an intern at *In These Times* and a producer at WGN Radio in Chicago.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF FX NETWORKS

BY LAKSHMI CHAUDHRY

Before-and-after shots from "Black. White."

Acting Your Race

The day after the 2006 Oscars, *Los Angeles Times* critic Kenneth Turan penned a scathing critique of the academy's choice of best film, *Crash*, which he described as "a feel-good film about racism." The film, he wrote, "could make you believe that you

had done your moral duty and examined your soul when in fact you were just getting your buttons pushed and your preconceptions reconfirmed." But that is an accurate description of almost every major Hollywood movie that deals with race; they are designed to appease the white-centric biases of studio executives and the mainstream audience they entertain.

Like its predecessors, *Crash* offers up a self-serving thesis of race that consists of two propositions: One, racism is a matter of individual prejudice; two, the antidote to racism is, therefore, personal redemption. In other words, we—not just whites but also blacks, Asians, Arabs, etc.—are equally guilty of racism, and we each need to move past our bigotry to recognize the common humanity that binds us all. At the heart of this individualist perspective on race is the asser-

tion of sameness: We are all racists; we are all human. Difference is an artificial cultural construct that disguises and distorts our true universal essence.

As various critics have pointed out over and over again, this kind of liberal humanism effectively lets white Americans off the hook and denies the need for radical social change. The failure of movies like *Crash* to articulate racial inequality, however, points to the more difficult challenge of talking about race, period. We do not know how to see the other as both different and equal, or how to recognize difference without resorting to essentialism. It's one of the reasons why progressives are more comfortable talking about race in terms of how people are treated than who they are. And that means we end up defining racial identity entirely in terms of power relations:

for example, whiteness equals privilege.

Many leading scholars on race have repeatedly argued against the liberal tendency to treat race—and therefore racial difference—as a social problem. They instead draw attention to the performative aspect of race, wherein racial identity is not a fixed unchanging essence but a set of mutable and contingent cultural behaviors. As Sarah Susannah Willie writes in her book *Acting Black*, “By treating race as acquired, like a skill or a behavior, we can begin to see it as something over which individuals have differing degrees of control and varying options for agency, as an aspect of identity that is at least partly performed, continuous, and contingent.”

As a woman of color, I find that theorizing race as a performance offers several benefits. One, it helps us recognize the fact that we all “act” our racial and ethnic identities, be it black, white, Chinese, Native American or, in my case, Indian. Two, it also reveals how people of color are forced to perform their identities in particular ways to meet the requirements of a racist culture—and in doing so, points to the way that racism shapes the most intimate parts of our selves.

Acting black, white

One of the most compelling examples of race-as-performance is currently playing itself out on television. The FX reality show “Black. White.” physically transforms an African-American and Caucasian family to look like the other race, and follows them around as they interact with the world in racially charged situations. On the surface, “Black. White.” offers a fairly standard view of racism as discrimination—i.e., how people are treated because of how they look. According to its producers, the aim of the show is to ask: “What is it like to live in someone else’s skin?” But “Black. White.”—intentionally or not—also raises a far more important question: What does it mean to “act” black or white?

The answer is revealed early in the series, when the two families gather to exchange tips about behavior that will help each other “pass.” For Carmen Wurgel, a white location scout in Santa Monica, the conversation reveals a “secret society with shared experiences and language

and customs.” But when it’s their turn to solicit advice, the African-American Sparks family politely declines. “I already know how to adapt and get along with white people. ... Black culture has to conform to white society,” says Brian, a contractor from Atlanta. Acting “white”

an Indian taxi-driver has no such option. Their inability to “cover” instead becomes the grist for cruel ethnic jokes that their better-disguised brothers and sisters are required to laugh at to prove their “whiteness.”

At first glance, “covering” seems only

We do not know how to see the other as both different and equal, or how to recognize difference without resorting to essentialism.

is not an option, but an essential survival skill for any person of color in America.

Author Kenji Yoshino calls this behavior “covering,” which is also the title of his recent book exposing the shortcomings of civil rights legislation. He defines covering in the context of race as the pressure to “act white” by eliminating or playing down non-white aspects of one’s identity along four axes: appearance (Don’t wear a sari, turban, veil, corn-rows.); affiliation (Speak excellent, unaccented English.); activism (Avoid ethnic or race-based organizations.); and association (Cultivate predominantly white social networks.) Yoshino argues that people of color—consciously or otherwise—perform this whiter version of their identity to satisfy an unspoken “social contract, in which racial minorities are told we will be rewarded for assimilating to white norms.”

Acting white not only determines how you are rewarded, but also acts as a marker of what you deserve. It’s why African Americans, as comedian David Chappelle observed in a recent television interview, are “bilingual,” adept at eliminating “black-associated” patterns of speech in a job interview or at the workplace. “When I am sitting at the table [in Hollywood], I want that white guy to know that my parents are better-educated than he is,” said Chappelle. Speaking white is speaking privilege.

Yoshino, however, brushes past the fact that the ability to “cover” is in itself a class marker within communities of color. It is only the relatively affluent who have the opportunity to learn the skills of acting white. A Latino housemaid or

about negating non-white norms of behavior. But at the heart of this imperative to “act white” lies a deeply racist and essentialist view of people of color. Yoshino points to Lawrence Mungin, a high-powered Harvard-educated attorney who spent his entire life “negating every possible stereotype about African-Americans in his behavior” because, in his words, “I wanted to show that I was like white people: ‘Don’t be afraid. I’m one of the good blacks.’” But as Yoshino notes, “In so carefully reversing every term of the racial stereotype, Mungin was defined by it as surely as a photograph is defined by its negative.”

Covering, however, doesn’t mention the ironic antithesis to Mungin represented by rap stars like 50 Cent, who assiduously perform every negative black stereotype in order to satisfy the fantasies of a white, middle-class audience, who then characterize such behavior as authentically “black.” And so when a naive and clueless Carmen Wurgel—who self-confessedly hasn’t “been around a lot of black people”—tries to “talk black,” she makes the mistake of playfully saying “Yo, bitch!” to her African-American counterpart, Renee Sparks.

Sadder still is when some people of color internalize this racist connection between performance and identity. In 1999, when psychologist Angela Neal-Barnett asked focus-group students to define “white” behavior, their list included enrolling in Advanced Placement or honors classes. It exemplified what Barack Obama described in his Democratic National Convention speech as “the slander that says a black youth with

a book is acting white.” This isn’t to say that anti-intellectualism is the sole preserve of African Americans, but to acknowledge that people of color are under pressure to perform different versions of their identity for different audiences, which includes acting more “authentic” to avoid being tagged variously as a “Banana,” “Coconut,” or “Oreo” by members of their own community.

Uncovering racism

Speaking of race-as-performance entails its own hazards. In “Black. White.” Rose Wurgel, Bruno’s smart and sensitive 18-year old daughter, is repulsed by what she calls the “language of stereotype” that becomes inevitable in conversations about “acting” black or white. “I don’t want to be putting out this bullshit,” she says. In his book, Yoshino describes being challenged by a female colleague who levels a similar charge:

But the covering idea could perpetuate the stereotypes that you want to eliminate. One way minorities break stereotypes is by acting against them. If every time they do so, people assume they are ‘covering’ some essential stereotypical identity, the stereotypes will never go away.

Yoshino’s answer is to express his “commitment to autonomy as a means of achieving authenticity,” but does not explain what he means by an “authentic” self. But when understood in the context of the race-as-performance thesis, however, his critique suggests that we should each be free to “act” our race according to our own needs and desires—rather than to confirm or subvert social expectations. And so Brian’s 17-year-old son, Nick, could become a mathematician who speaks unaccented English, wears his hair in corn-rows, and enjoys playing golf with his African-American wife—and be entirely, authentically “black.”

The freedom to perform our identity gives us the power to define its meaning. But that freedom cannot be achieved by simply changing individual behavior or attitudes, which are merely symptoms of a greater social disease that afflicts our culture, its traditions and structures. Resisting this institutional pressure to perform distorted versions of ourselves has to be a collective struggle waged in courtrooms, schools, workplaces and in the media. It is only then that we can be both equal and different, together. ■

CW Network: Back in Black?

By Natalie Y. Moore

DIVERSITY IS AN integral part” of the newly formed CW television network, says spokesman Paul McGuire. On May 18, the channel will announce its fall television lineup, and black viewers are looking to see what it includes for them.

Earlier this winter, CBS Corporation and Warner Bros. Entertainment unveiled the CW as their attempt to launch a viable fifth network. The dissolution of UPN and the WB—the revenue-losing fifth and sixth networks—cleared the way for this network, owned jointly by the respective parent companies. CW officials insist they “want to appeal to the various disparate elements” of their target market, the 18 to 34 year old demographic.

But African Americans are not buying the party favors or champagne yet. Once upon a time, a little network called Fox decided to compete with the Big Three—CBS, NBC and ABC. In the mid-’80s, Black-themed and produced shows like “In Living Color,” “Living Single,” “Roc” and “Martin” inspired a cult-like following among black viewers, who hoped they’d gained a network that consistently valued their tastes and dollars in a non-patronizing way. That symbiotic relationship ran its course by the mid-’90s, when Fox began to cater to a mainstream, white audience with shows like “Ally McBeal” and “Party of Five.”

Kristal Brent Zook, author of *Color by Fox: The Fox Network and the Revolution in Black Television*, says executives initially made a pragmatic business decision to go out on a limb and give unique creative control to blacks. They succeeded by seizing the urban youth market.

Both the WB and UPN formed in 1995 and quickly mimicked the Fox model. Steve Harvey, Jamie Foxx and the younger Wayans Brothers had shows on the WB. UPN is often dubbed “Us Peoples Network,” a tongue-in-cheek nod toward its casting choices. But profits and ratings lagged for both networks.

With the growth of cable over the last



PHOTO COURTESY OF UPN

decade, competition has grown fiercer. For the CW to turn a profit and keep from drifting behind in the ratings, Zook says edgy thinking is necessary.

UPN currently has a lineup that includes several shows with mostly black characters: “One on One,” “Half and Half,” “Eve” and “All of Us.” Yet while the network’s new breakout hit “Everybody Hates Chris” demonstrates that buffoonery is not the only comedic device to win viewers, that’s just one show—and it’s not enough to cancel out the dozens of times on each episode of “Girlfriends” that Maya does a sassy, sister-girl neck roll.

In 1999, Kweisi Mfume of the NAACP described network television, with its lack of people of color as executives, a “virtual whitewash.” Since then, CBS has instituted diversity initiatives, spanning from writing fellowships for minorities to acting workshops. Its Web site displays UPN minority and youth stars, proclaiming, “we aim to ensure that our national viewing audience is reflected in our programming and our people.” A CW spokesman said it was yet to be determined whether the new network would continue with those initiatives—even though the parent company CBS Corporation is still involved in the launch.

The one possible upside to the ever-increasing media conglomeration is that these mega-companies may have resources and money to pour into smart programming. “That would be the hope, but we don’t know the bottom line for them,” says Jannette Dates, dean of the John H. Johnson School of Communi-

cations at Howard University. Dates, co-author of *Split Image: African Americans in the Mass Media*, says cable networks like HBO (owned by Time Warner) have demonstrated that smart programming that is both compelling and diverse, such as original movies on Dorothy Dandridge and a medical revolution at Johns Hopkins Hospital featuring rapper Mos Def, can succeed.

Other minority groups also yearn to see themselves on the small screen. This fall My Network TV, a primetime venture launched by Fox, debuts. This network channel will be picked up by some former UPN or WB stations. Two English-language *telenovelas*—Latin America soap operas—will inaugurate its programming.

If the CW hopes to compete with the Big Four and carve out a niche, executives may want to take note of an overlooked tidbit. There already is a viable fifth network: Univision. In last month's sweeps, on a Thursday night, the Spanish-language station beat out UPN and the WB—combined. ■

The Liberal Communists of Porto Davos

By Slavoj Žižek

IN THE LAST decade, Davos and Porto Alegre have emerged as the twin cities of globalization. In Davos, the exclusive Swiss ski resort, the global elite of managers, statesmen and media personalities meets under heavy police protection, trying to convince us (and themselves) that globalization is its own best remedy. In the sub-tropical, Brazilian city of Porto Alegre, the counter-elite of the anti-globalization movement convenes, trying to convince us (and themselves) that capitalist globalization is not our fate, that, as their official slogan has it, "another world is possible." Lately, however, the Porto Alegre reunions seem to have lost their impetus. Where did the bright stars of Porto Alegre go?

Some of them, at least, moved to Davos

itself! That is to say, more and more, the predominant tone of the Davos meetings comes from the group of entrepreneurs who French journalist Olivier Malnuit ironically refers to as "liberal communists" (that is "liberal" in the pro-market, European sense) who no longer accept the opposition between "Davos" (global capitalism) and "Porto Alegre" (the new social movements' alternative to global capitalism). They claim that we can have the global capitalist cake (thrive as profitable entrepreneurs) and eat it too (endorse the anti-capitalist causes of social responsibility, ecological concerns, etc.). No need for Porto Alegre, they say, since Davos itself can become Porto Davos.

So who are these liberal communists? The usual gang of suspects: Bill Gates and George Soros, the CEOs of Google, IBM, Intel, eBay, as well as court-philosophers like Thomas Friedman. What makes this group interesting is that their ideology is becoming indistinguishable from that of Antonio Negri, who has praised postmodern digital capitalism, which, according to Negri, is becoming

[art space]



Ashes and Snow, an ongoing multimedia project by Gregory Colbert, captures the dialogue between humans and "nature's living masterpieces." Started 14 years ago, the project involves photography, film, installations and a novel of letters. Colbert's "21st-century bestiary includes more than 40 totemic species" from his nearly 30 trips around the globe. The exhibit is breathtaking, showcasing a sincere diligence and a continuous commitment to the sacred and artistic nature of animals. Part of the Nomadic Museum, a temporary structure designed by architect Shigeru Ban comprised of used shipping containers and other recycled materials, the exhibit will be at the Santa Monica Pier until May 14. Visit ashesandsnow.org for more details.



almost indistinguishable from communism. By Negri's reckoning, both the old Right—with its ridiculous belief in authority, order and parochial patriotism—and the old Left—with its big Struggle against Capitalism—are the true conservatives today, completely out of touch with the new realities as they fight their shadow-theatre struggles. The signifier of this new reality in the liberal communist Newspeak is “smart.” Smart means dynamic and nomadic against centralized bureaucracy; dialogue and cooperation against central authority; flexibility against routine; culture and knowledge against old industrial production; and spontaneous interaction against fixed hierarchy.

Bill Gates—software mogul and philanthropist—is the icon of what he called “frictionless capitalism,” the post-industrial society in which we witness the “end of labor,” in which software is winning over hardware and in which the young nerd has replaced the black-suited manager. In the new company headquarters, there is little external discipline, and (ex)hackers dominate the scene, working long hours and enjoying free drinks in plush surroundings. In this respect, it is a crucial feature of Gates as icon that he is (perceived as) the ex-hacker who made it. At the fantasmatic level, the underlying notion here is that Gates is a subversive marginal hooligan who has taken over and dresses himself up as a respectable chairman.

Liberal communists are pragmatic, they hate ideology. There is no single exploited Working Class today, only concrete problems to be solved, such as starvation in Africa, the plight of Muslim women or religious fundamentalist violence. When there is a humanitarian crisis in Africa—and liberal communists love humanitarian crises, they bring out the best in them!—instead of employing anti-imperialist rhetoric, we should simply examine what really solves the problem: Engage people, governments and business in a common enterprise, approach the crisis in a creative, unconventional way, and don't worry about labels.

Liberal communists also love May '68: What an explosion of youthful energy and creativity! How it shattered the confines of stiff bureaucratic order! What an impetus it gave to economic and social life after the political illusions dropped away! And although they've changed since then, they didn't resign to reality, but rather changed in order to *really* change the world, to *really* revolutionize our lives. Didn't Marx say that all the world's political upheavals paled in comparison with the invention of the steam engine when it came to changing our lives? And wouldn't Marx say today: What are all the protests against global capitalism in comparison with the Internet?

Above all, liberal communists see themselves as true citizens of the world, good people who worry. They worry about populist fundamentalists and ir-

responsible, greedy corporations. They see the “deeper causes” of today's problems, the mass poverty and hopelessness that breed fundamentalist terror. So their goal is not to earn money, but to change the world (and, in this way, as a by-product, make even more money).

The catch, of course, is that, in order to give it to the community, first you have to take it (or, as they put it, create it). The rationale of liberal communists is that, in order to really help people, you must have the means to do it. And as experience—the dismal failure of all centralized state and collectivist approaches—teaches us, private initiative is by far the most efficient way. So if the state wants to regulate their business, to tax them excessively, it is effectively undermining its own official goal (to make life better for the large majority, to really help those in need).

Liberal communists do not want to just be machines for generating profits: They want their lives to have a deeper meaning. They are against old-fashioned religions and for spirituality sans confessional meditation (everybody knows that Buddhism foreshadowed brain sciences, that the power of meditation can be measured scientifically!). Their preferred motto is social responsibility and gratitude: They are the first to admit that society was incredibly good to them by allowing them to deploy their talents and amass wealth. And after all, what is the point of their success if not to help people?

However, is any of this really something new? What about the good old Andrew Carnegie, employing a private army to brutally suppress organized labor and then distributing large parts of his wealth for educational, arts and humanitarian causes, proving that, although a man of steel, he has a heart of gold? In the same way, today's liberal communists give with one hand what they first took away with the other.

This is what makes a figure like Soros ethically so problematic. His daily routine is a lie embodied: Half of his working time is devoted to financial speculations and the other half to humanitarian activities (providing finances for cultural and democratic activities in post-Communist countries, underwriting the movement in the United States to get public money out of private elections, coining pejorative terms like “free-market fundamentalists”) that ultimately fight the effects of his own speculations. Likewise the two

faces of Bill Gates: a cruel businessman, destroying or buying out competitors, aiming at virtual monopoly, employing all the dirty tricks to achieve his goals ... and the greatest philanthropist in the history of mankind.

In the liberal communist ethics, the ruthless pursuit of profit is counteracted by charity: Charity today is the humanitarian mask that hides the underlying economic exploitation. In a blackmail of gigantic proportions, the developed countries are constantly "helping" the undeveloped (with aid, credits, etc.), thereby avoiding the key issue, namely, their complicity in and co-responsibility for the miserable situation of the undeveloped.

And the same goes for the very opposition between the "smart" and "non-smart" approach. Outsourcing is the key notion here. By way of outsourcing, you export the (necessary) dark side—low wages, harsh labor practices, ecological pollution—to "non-smart" Third World places (or invisible places in the First World itself). The ultimate liberal communist dream is to export the working class itself to the invisible

Third World sweatshops.

Etienne Balibar, the French Marxist philosopher, distinguishes the two opposite but complementary forms of excessive violence in the world today: the objective ("structural") violence that is inherent in the social conditions of global capitalism—i.e., the "automatic" creation of excluded and dispensable individuals (the homeless, the uninsured, the unemployed)—and the subjective violence of newly emerging ethnic and/or religious fundamentalisms. While they fight subjective violence, liberal communists are the very agents of the structural violence that creates the conditions for such explosions of subjective violence. Precisely because liberal communists want to resolve all these secondary malfunctions of the global capital system—to render it "frictionless" for their mechanations—they are the direct embodiment of what is wrong with the system as such.

In the midst of any necessary tactical alliances one has to make with liberal communists when fighting racism, sexism and religious obscurantism, we should remember: Liberal communists are the enemy of every true progressive struggle today. ■

Barbarians at the Helm

By Christopher Hayes

FIRST THEY IGNORE you," opens Jerome Armstrong and Markos Moulitsas Zuniga's new book *Crashing the Gates*, "then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win."

If the choice of this epigram from Ghandi seems immodest, its confidence isn't unwarranted. Moulitsas' blog, DailyKos, gets 600,000 page views a day; Democratic congressmen regularly post on his blog and Armstrong's, MyDD; and original netroots hero Howard Dean now runs the Democratic National Committee. The barbarians, then, are already well inside the gates. Hell, they're practically picking out drapes for the palace.

Armstrong and Moulitsas present themselves as outsiders and iconoclasts, but *CtG* is best understood in the context of the rapidly-growing genre that might be called: "What's the Matter With Democrats?" But where Tom Frank argued that Democrats have abandoned economic populism, and George Lakoff argued that they've done a poor job of framing

spin cycle

BY JESSICA CLARK AND TRACY VAN SLYKE

Calling One Wingnut

Mike Stark's battle with Bill O'Reilly started last October when he called O'Reilly's daily radio show to tell listeners to visit the "true no spin zone": watchdog group Media Matters for America (www.mediamatters.com).

O'Reilly, who has long vilified Media Matters, immediately cut Stark off, pronouncing, "We got another nut on the air." He threatened to trace the call and pay Stark a visit at his home.

In late January, Stark launched Calling All Wingnuts (callingallwingnuts.com) a combination blog and organizing Web site that provides tools for progressives to counter misinforma-

tion spouted on the radio airwaves.

Stark and his volunteers, dubbed the "Wingnut Spinners," soon began a new call-in campaign after O'Reilly called for the firing of his MSNBC competitor Keith Olberman on the air. After calling in—to a call-in show—"Spinners" began receiving return calls from Fox News' security department, which threatened legal trouble for their alleged "harassment" of O'Reilly.

Olbermann has since picked up this story on his nightly show, "Countdown," and has begun to rake O'Reilly over the coals. So far, O'Reilly has not sicced Fox security on Olbermann.

Reaching Out to Local Media

Stark has also offered his tips on talking back to conservatives to the Roots Project, a new effort to influence Congressional members where they live by contacting the media that serve their districts. The first outreach campaign harnessed blog readers living in Kansas, Maine and Nebraska to write letters to the editors of papers in those regions, urging local senators to investigate the illegal NSA wiretaps.

Jane Hamsher is coordinating the Roots Project through her blog firedoglake (<http://firedoglake.blogspot.com/>). She says organizing calls into local

conservative radio shows is the next frontier.

The Roots Project also hopes to engage and showcase regional progressive bloggers. "We don't want it to be outside agitation," says Hamsher. "We don't want to send 1,000 people from California pouncing on West Virginia. Our ability to drive traffic through to a West Virginia blog and have them be the point person—that's where we can be the most effective."

their message, this book argues that the left's failures are primarily organizational and infrastructural. Think of it this way: United Airlines didn't declare bankruptcy because air travel declined, or because its ads suddenly got crappy. The problem was that it persisted in using an old business model and got out-hustled by scrappier, more innovative competitors.

And so it is, the authors argue, with the Democratic Party and its key allies in the upper echelons of the progressive movement. Largely due to the stewardship of a sclerotic, clueless old guard, the left has failed to adapt to the changing political terrain. Even after a succession of crushing defeats, "Democrats act as though they are still in power in D.C. and they just need to tweak their talking points and dispatch their lobbyists to Capitol Hill to get their legislation through."

Take, for example, the issue groups. Beginning in the '70s, single-issue groups like NARAL and the Sierra Club won a string of remarkable victories: from *Roe v. Wade* to the establishment of the EPA. But Armstrong and Moulitsas argue convincingly that the model of single-issue politics now produces diminishing returns. Hypersensitive about perceived slights to their own issue agendas, organizations often slavishly follow their own party line to the detriment of natural allies.

For two self-described political outsiders, Armstrong and Moulitsas' analysis can focus on the surprisingly arcane: The reason the Democrats keep losing is ... drum roll ... they pay their media consultants by commission rather than a flat fee! But if much of the book seems mired in the picayune, that's because in politics the devil *really* is in the details. After all, a few Ohio counties kept John Kerry from becoming president of the whole country. So it matters that, unlike their Republican counterparts, Democratic media consultants are paid based on how much advertising they buy, rather than how effective they are, because it means they generally blow as much money as possible. And it matters that while young interns at right-wing think tanks are feted and compensated, young interns at progressive organizations receive measly stipends and don't get health insurance.

In fact, there's something remarkably bracing about the authors' approach. The Unified Theory of Progressive Revival may remain the Holy Grail, but while pursuing it, why not start attacking the

excerpt



Those Hot Iranian Nights

My Sister, Guard Your Veil; My Brother, Guard Your Eyes: Uncensored Iranian Voices is a compilation of essays from some of Iran's most prominent artists, writers, and intellectuals. It opens "a series of vibrant perspectives on concealed Iranian realms," writes Editor Lila Azam Zanganeh. "Sex in the Time of Mullahs," from Lipstick Jihad author Azadeh Moaveni, recounts the author's initiation into the surprisingly steamy night life of Tehran.

Iran's actual sexual revolution is to be found in the baghs and low-rise cement apartment blocks where ordinary young people openly swap lovers. By practicing premarital sex into their twenties and beyond, and by not seeking to conceal it (at least among themselves), it is middle-class young Iranians who are pioneering the sexual frontier. In the era of postrevolution economic decline, the average marriage age has jumped, and young men and women face a long stretch of single years their parents were never forced to contend with. In the contest between traditional sexual mores and pheromones, the latter have long since won out, and at any given moment in Tehran, tens of thousands of youths like Davar and his friends share the keys to modest *garçonnières*. Behind those walls, there are no designer labels, no expensive stereos, none of the trappings of the storied hedonism that would have you believe Iran's erotic evolution is cinematic or particularly Western. If anything, it is an indigenous way of coping with the Islamic Republic, of reclaiming the freedoms that have been stifled, of filling the void of opportunities lost.

small systemic dysfunctions that cripple the movement's effectiveness?

Which isn't to say the book is free of missteps. Armstrong and Moulitsas are proudly non-ideological, but at times their obsession with tactics over principles creates gaps in understanding. It's true that NARAL and NOW, which come in for particularly intense criticism in the book, haven't been successful lately, and they should focus more on building a Democratic majority than electing lone "pro-life" Republicans. But in their criticisms, Armstrong and Moulitsas seem unable to comprehend why choice activists might be miffed when the Democratic party backs candidates who believe in forced pregnancy. And when it comes to possible FEC regulation of the Internet, Moulitsas is willing to stand with right-wing bloggers against campaign finance reform groups, who are traditional progressive allies. Moulitsas is right on the merits, but if that's not interest group politics, then I don't know what is.

All in all, though, what's most striking about *CtG* is that while Moulitsas and Armstrong occasionally ride their

preferred hobby horses, you get the sense throughout that they didn't come up with a thesis and search for the evidence to back it up. Instead, they traveled around, conducted lots of interviews and asked people on the ground what's working and what isn't. In case the irony is lost, these two bloggers went out and did some reporting. (And some reading: The book benefits from heavy citations of the fine work of the *Washington Monthly's* Amy Sullivan and the *New Republic's* Ryan Lizza, among others.)

If you spend time talking to progressive activists, you'll find that many of *CtG's* main arguments now constitute the emerging conventional wisdom. The new progressive membership groups, like MoveOn and Democracy for America, have eschewed single-issue structures to focus more generally on movement building; influential donors are trying to impose accountability on consultants; and Democratic politicians now vie to court the favor of the new activists.

You'd have to have to strain to hear anyone in the Democratic establishment laughing. ■

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

Cancer in a Can



FIFTEEN YEARS AGO the Food and Drug Administration said, "Trust us." Its scientists had found benzene, a known carcinogen, in some sodas and fruit drinks. The same levels in drinking water would have triggered

mandatory action and public notification through newspaper, radio and TV ads. Yet the FDA neither sounded the alarm nor required the beverage industry to fix the problem.

Instead, it cut a private deal. FDA chemist Greg Diachenko told *beverage-daily.com* that "Soft drinks manufacturers told us that they would get the word out and they were reformulating."

It wouldn't have been hard. Benzene, linked to leukemia and other cancers of the blood, is created by the reaction of two common additives: sodium benzoate, a preservative, and ascorbic acid (vitamin C). Ignoring basic chemistry, major brands left the avoidable combo in many drinks, especially those featuring fruit juice or fortified with vitamin C to lure health-conscious parents.

According to a 1990 internal FDA memo, the National Soft Drinks Association clarified industry priorities, expressing "concern about the presence of benzene traces in their products and the potential for adverse publicity associated with this problem."

Fifteen years later, the benzene is hitting the fan. Recently, Germany and the United Kingdom announced investigations and the FDA admits it is taking another look. But Washington's drink of choice remains a heady cocktail of campaign contributions and secrecy, impairing its ability and will to regulate the safety of everything from mines to meat, from skyscrapers to soda.

Some states have circumvented Washington's lax standards and weak

enforcement. California's Proposition 65, which requires companies to alert the public of potentially dangerous toxins in food, has sparked lawsuits over mercury in canned tuna and lead in Mexican candy.

The Republican-dominated House has countered with a circumvention of its own. On March 8, as lawmakers pledged allegiance to industry, and FDA officials chanted another dreary chorus of "Trust us," the House passed the National Uniformity for Food Act. If the Senate follows suit, the FDA would control almost all food labeling, and states would be barred from posting stricter warnings on carcinogens, genetic engineering, carbon monoxide-treated meat or growth hormones.

"This bill is going to overturn 200 state laws that protect our food supply," said Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.). "Why are we doing that? What's wrong with our system of federalism?"

President Bush's answer to that question lies in the ways he has undercut states' rights and tilted the constitutionally defined balance of powers by expanding executive authority. His sentiment, if not his language, echoes Dick Cheney's suggestion to Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.). With go-fuck-yourself verve, his administration has launched a stealth campaign to centralize regulatory power in Washington, while cronies, lackeys and co-conspirators work to disable safeguards and to hide outrages that range from abusive detention camps to poison in your kid's drink.

The FDA bill that cuts states out of the food labeling business is but one part of a broad strategy leaving the country's regulatory system increasingly vulnerable to political and financial pressure. Changes quietly imposed by the administration include limiting an individual's right to sue in state court over defective or injurious products, undermining state laws on discriminatory lending, and barring

states from requiring tougher vehicle emission and safety standards. The *New York Times* referred to the practice as "silent tort reform" and noted that, "Using a variety of largely unheralded regulations, officials appointed by President Bush have moved in recent months to neuter the states."

The administration's most gung-ho allies are the lobbyists and interest groups that profit from less regulation. All insist that the industry they represent has the public's interest at heart and that it can and will police itself without government "interference."

The backers of the FDA labeling bill, led by the corporations and trade groups in the National Uniformity for Food Coalition (NUFC), say their key goal is preventing consumer "confusion." Meanwhile, legislators are indeed getting an unambiguous message—in the language of cash. NUFC members contributed more than \$3 million in the 2005-06 election cycle and \$31 million since 1998, according to data the *San Francisco Chronicle* crunched using Center for Responsive Politics data.

Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Kool-Aid (Kraft), Tropicana and Cadbury Schweppes all produce drinks that contain the potentially dangerous benzene-producing combo according to research by the Environmental Working Group. And a look at the NUFC Web site confirms that all of these companies are members of the trade group that pushed for the bill.

The average American consumes almost 70 gallons of fruit drink and soda a year, while males 12-29 swill more than double that in soda alone. The American Beverage Association (also an NUFC member) declares on its Web site that the public craves a choice. It neglects to note that if consumers choose a benzene-contaminated drink, that choice may result in cancer. ■

Contact Terry J. Allen at tallen@igc.org.

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BOOKS

THE AMAZING HISTORY of West Virginia's Coal Miners and our Union. Written in the early 50s; just published in 2005 by William C. Blizard (Bill's son!). www.whenminers-march.com

BOOKS, SOME FREE, for download at www.defraudingamerica.com on matters of national interest, written by and with former government agents, insiders.

THE NEWSPAPER BOY by Leon. A new novel about an Irish American family the O'Connors and their experiences during 1900's. www.bbotw.com

EVENTS

"COLLEGE OF COMPLEXES— Chicago's weekly free speech forum—www.collegeofcomplexes.org."

A WORLD BEYOND Capitalism, International Conference—registration, meals, workshops, camping, festivals: free. Monthly Meetings Worldwide. www.aworldbeyonddcapitalism.org, www.CommonUnityPeaceConference.org (503)727-2622

INDEPENDENT VOTERS OF Illinois—open monthly meetings of the National Affairs Committee, Chicago, www.iviipoNA.org, cpaidock@hotmail.com or (312) 939-5105.

EVENTS

RETHINKING MARXISM 2006, 26-28 October 2006, University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Join Ernesto Laclau, Julie Graham, Stephen Resnick, Richard Wolff, Susan Buck-Morss, Kojin Karatani, Liza Featherstone, Stephen Cullenberg, David F. Rucio, Susan Jahoda, Antonio Callari, Warren Montag, Sut Jhally, and others in an international gathering of students, scholars, and activists. The journal *Rethinking Marxism* invites proposals for videos, performances, papers, and panels. Instructions for submitting proposals (deadline is 1 August) and registration are available at rethinkingmarxism2006.org.

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Ultimate Anarchist

Continued from back page

Service agents showed up at his gym in Olympia, Wash., last fall.

A t-shirt prompted the visit. While Monson was preparing for a fight in Portland, a film crew came to the gym and recorded his outfit that day, which included a tank top that read “Assassinate Bush.” When he entered Portland’s Rose Garden for the fight, a video clip of him training in the shirt was played on the Jumbotron, and after he finished off his opponent in the first round, he was more interested in speaking to the post-match media about the devastation of Hurricane Katrina than his fight career. He mentioned his anger that the Bush administration had diverted \$76 million from the Army Corps of Engineers for the levies, and that the National Guard were in Iraq instead of Louisiana and Mississippi. “I was making a political statement, trying to open people’s eyes,” says Monson of his t-shirt and post-fight comments.

Not long after, he had three sets of open eyes walking through the doors of his gym. “The Secret Service told me that they wanted to search my gym and my house. They said that if I refused, they would have a warrant within an hour.” They poked around the gym and then headed over to Monson’s house. “I told them that they could go to my house if they wanted, but that I was going to stay here and finish my workout,” Monson says, not sounding the least bit intimidated. “They haven’t bothered me since.”

The UFC fighting style is called Mixed Martial Arts, but at times it looks more like a barroom brawl, especially to non-practitioners who miss the technique and strategy. It’s easy to poke fun at the event: heavily muscled and tattooed men wearing skimpy skin-tight trunks, celebrity models in the stands beside drunk frat boys wearing wife beaters with their caps on backwards. Its popularity has skyrocketed, thanks in part to the self-styled “first cable network for men,” Spike TV, which has a UFC-based reality show. Tickets can go for nearly \$1,000, and sell out quickly.

But the sport is more than mere show. Monson works hard to maintain his gargantuan body. When preparing for a match, he’ll train six days a week—lifting weights, running, boxing, grappling—and though a veteran at 33, he feels like

he’s just now reaching his prime in what he believes is the hardest sport in the world. “I would describe it as the evolution of unarmed combat,” Monson says. “You have to know kickboxing, jujitsu, wrestling. If you don’t know how to do even one of them, you’ll be beaten bad.”

Despite his build, Monson is more technician than brawler, and in 1999 and 2005 he won the Abu Dhabi World Submission Championship, held annually in that tiny country recently making headlines, the United Arab Emirates. He takes each UFC fight very seriously. “You can use any technique, and you have to be in great physical shape. You’re facing a guy that’s trying to knock you out or submit you, so it’s no joke.”

Monson sees no contradiction between his radical beliefs and his full-time occupation. “What I do is completely different than war, because everyone wants to be there, and it’s a competition. There’s no victim. We’re all entertainers,” he explains. “If there is any contradiction, it’s that we’re part of the capitalist machine, and I’m really just a wage slave. You know, we don’t make any money without fighting, and if I win I get more; if I lose I get less. But it’s simply a sport. Sure, it’s somewhat like a gladiator sport, but it’s voluntary.”

Monson grew up middle class in Minnesota. His mother still works as a nurse, and his late father worked at a penitentiary. He graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he wrestled, and then received his Masters in Psychology from the University of Minnesota. During his graduate work, Monson had his political awakening—a course entitled Community Psychology.

“Oh man, that class really opened my eyes,” he says. “Just looking at the way the world is run, the way that the people that might be disabled or have mental issues are left behind. How education and general welfare are not a priority, and how the elite run everything for their own benefit. Then I started reading a bunch of stuff—*Animal Farm*, the *International Socialist Review*, Chomsky—and I started thinking in a different way.” Monson the Ultimate Fighter uses Plato’s allegory of the cave to describe the experience.

After graduating from Minnesota, he moved to Washington State, where from 1997 to 2001 he counseled the mentally ill for Lewis County; his primary responsibility was to determine whether an individual needed to be institutionalized.



“I started right when they were pushing through welfare reform, and so we had all of these huge cuts in money for mental health and welfare. It’s the same basic idea with No Child Left Behind. The government tells you that you have to cut your programs, cut your money for books, cut the money for teachers, but then you are expected to somehow do better. It’s a brilliant strategy, really, from their perspective.”

Despite being a world-class competitor, Monson finds time to remain politically engaged. In 2003, he marched against the Iraq War in Seattle, and protested the Free Trade Area of the Americas in Miami (where the notoriously aggressive cops wisely left Monson alone). He is also a member of the Industrial Workers of the World, and despite the controversy that surrounds him, continues to engage people within the fighting community about politics.

So what lies ahead for “The Snowman”? At the moment his focus is on his next big fight. On April 15, he’ll be back in the Octagon—the distinctive eight-sided ring of the UFC—hoping to make quick work of Marcio “Pe de Pano (Sugarfoot)” Cruz. Then, if all goes well, a title shot.

“But this is not my whole life,” Monson says of fighting. “I’ve got children and a girlfriend, and I like to be with my family. I try to remain involved in political events. After my next fight, I’ll be taking my son to Montreal. They’re having an Anarchist Book Fair, and they invited me to come up and do a workshop.” The topic: self-defense. ■

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THE ULTIMATE FIGHTING

A NARCHIST

BY GABRIEL THOMPSON

HE IS, WITHOUT A DOUBT, the toughest subscriber to *In These Times*. Standing 5' 9" tall, weighing 240 pounds and sporting a shaved head, Jeff "The Snowman" Monson looks like a cartoon ready to pop, a compressed giant of crazy shoulders, massive biceps and meaty forearms.

When he sneers, people shudder. When he sweats, they turn away. When he's angry, your best bet is to run.

He's angry right now, even though his combat career in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC)—an often-bloody tournament that combines martial arts disciplines like Brazilian Jujitsu and Muay Thai Kickboxing—is taking off. In February's pay-per-view event, Monson easily beat his opponent with a chokehold in the first round. If things keep going this way, he could have a title shot in the heavy-weight division, against the explosive Andrei "The Pit Bull" Arlovski. So no, it's not his future career prospects that have him pissed. It's the state of the world.

"I'm not some sort of conspiracy theorist," Monson says

of his political leanings. "I'm not talking about how the government is trying to hide UFOs. I just want to do away with hierarchy. I'm saying that our economic system, capitalism, is structured so that it only benefits a small percentage of very wealthy people. When I was traveling in Brazil, they had us staying at a really posh hotel. Outside the hotel there was a mom sleeping on the sidewalk with her two kids. That's when reality hits you. What did that woman ever do? Who did she ever hurt?"

Monson wears his politics on his sleeve, as well as the rest of his body. An anarcho-syndicalist star is tattooed on his chest, an anarchy sign on his back and another "A" on his leg. While he loves his sport, he also feels a responsibility to use whatever exposure he receives for a larger purpose. "I don't think I'm more important than anyone else, but since some people are paying attention, then I'm going to use this as a vehicle to express myself," he says. Some fans have labeled him anti-American, but he shrugs off such criticism. He was slightly taken aback, however, when three Secret

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